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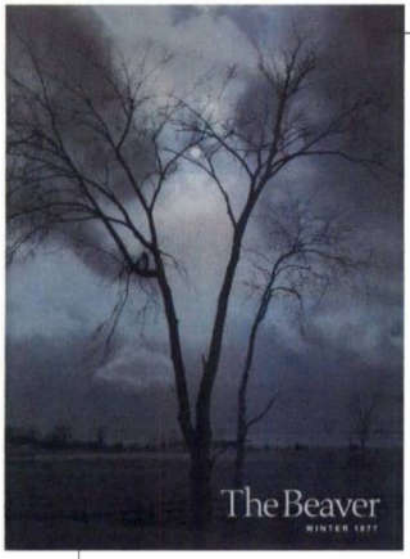
The Beaver

EXPLORING · CANADA'S · HISTORY

ASPECTS OF WAR

1939-1945



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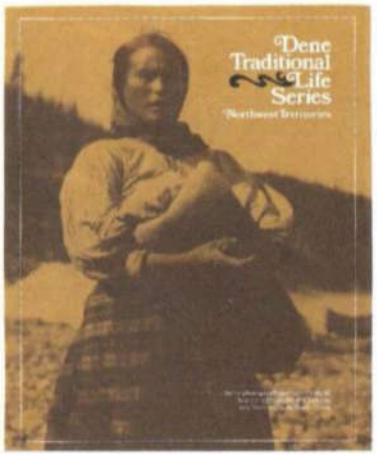

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The Beaver

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Aspects of War
1939-1945

Fifty Years On

A full half century has now gone by since that grey morning in early June 1944 when Allied sea, air and land forces launched what has been called the greatest combined military operation in history against Hitler's "Fortress Europe" along the heavily-defended holiday beaches of Bay of the Seine.

Time has taken a greater toll on that great army of over 100,000 than the Germans were able to do on the day, but for many the memories of that dramatic time are still vivid and deeply moving. For them, 50 years are like a day. Many of the survivors from both sides will visit the old battlefields this June and see again the well-remembered or long forgotten places where they went through an ordeal of fire when they were young.

Such place-names as Bernières-sur-Mer, Vaux, St. Aubin-sur-Mer, Courseulles-sur-Mer and Caen — for half a century common currency wherever old soldiers meet — were unknown to most on that morning of 6 June 1944 when the armies came ashore.

There is a familiar D-Day newsreel image that is seen in almost every film documentary about the Normandy invasion. The camera is positioned inside a landing craft. Soldiers crouch tensely as the vessel enters shallow water. Then the gates open and we see a length of beach studded with barbed wire and other obstructions. Directly ahead through the smoke is a narrow, two-storey house, windowless, dark, abandoned. This is a Canadian image, the moment of contact at Bernières-sur-Mer on the bleak morning of 6 June 1944.

It is a frightening picture, even for those watching from the safety of an armchair at home, fifty years on. For a moment you almost feel as if you, too, will be called to step out into the fury of D-Day and make for the beach. We can hardly imagine, fifty years later, how those young Canadians felt as the doors opened onto the chaos of battle. For some, it would be their first and last view of France. For others, it would be the first step in a long march into danger and an experience that would alter their lives forever.

Many of them were sea-sick as the landing craft manoeuvered through choppy waters toward the Normandy shore, but they had the comfort of knowing that they were part of a vast Armada. There were Canadian aircraft overhead and Canadian guns pounding enemy defences on shore. This was not Dieppe.

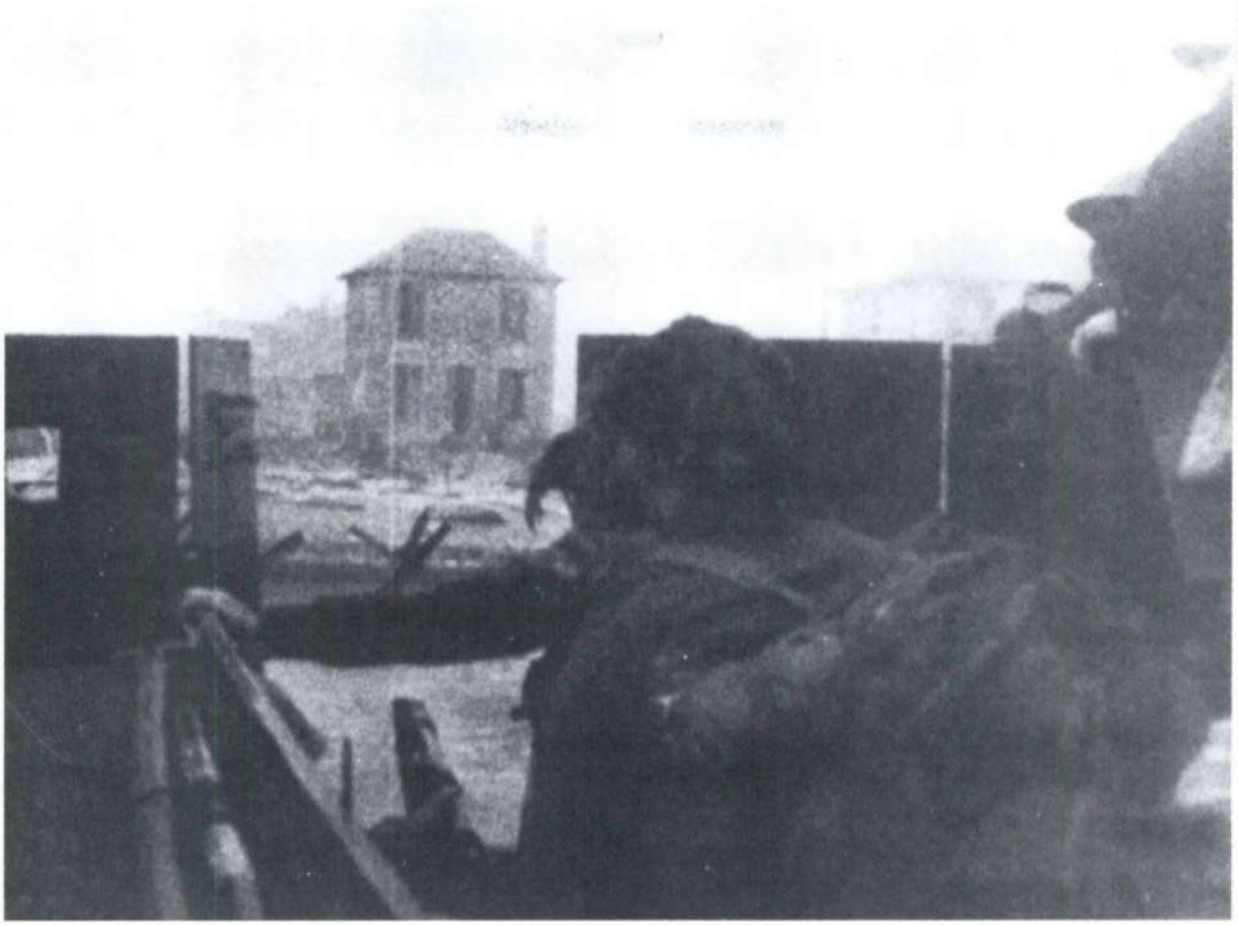
It was a tough grind, nevertheless. The formidable German defences along the coast had suffered less damage than anticipated during the preliminary bombardment and the defenders, many of whom were foreign conscripts, were relatively few in number but fought tenaciously. Canadian units faced tough opposition all along the Juno sector. This time, however, it was not, as at Dieppe, a question of being pinned down on the beach by heavy enemy fire. All along the Juno beach, in the centre of the British position, Canadian units, well-trained and carefully rehearsed for this action, overcame enemy resistance and achieved their objectives. The price was high, but lower than many had predicted, with 1,074 Canadian dead, wounded or missing. The bill would rise rapidly in the days ahead, but Canadians could pause for moment on the night of 6 June and look back on a day's work well done.

D-Day was bad enough, but the really desperate and difficult grinding would come in the days and weeks ahead as German reserves moved up and challenged the advance. Desmond Morton, in *A Military History of Canada,* describes what came next:

> It was only a beginning. Staff officers had predicted a bitter fight for the beaches; they had not thought as hard about the subsequent battles through dense Norman countryside, where every feature favoured German defenders. In the two days after D-Day, Canadians were bent and bloodied by encountering a nemesis that would dog them to its own ultimate destruction, the 12th SS Panzer Division, formed from the *Hitler Jugend.* Even long training was no substitute for battle experience; Canadians won it the hard way.

All that, however, lay ahead as the Allies contemplated their success at the end of D-Day. John Keegan, in his book *Six Armies in Normandy,* records the mood at Supreme Headquarters as the pattern of the day became clear:

> There Eisenhower and Montgomery had followed at a few hours remove the progress of the fighting all along the landing zone, from the American airhead at the base of the Cotentin to the British east of the Orne. They had been content with the reports of the British seaborne landings at Gold and Sword beaches, west and east of Juno. They had been gratified by the ease and speed with which the American 4th Division had got ashore at Utah to rescue the parachutists. They had been racked by the sufferings and near failure of the American 1st Division on Omaha, which had taken 2,000 casualties simply in the business of crossing the beach from surf to cliff foot. But nothing in the day's news brought as much satisfaction as the account of the Canadian landing.



National Archives of Canada

Bernières-sur-Mer, 6 June 1944

Not only had the 3rd Division extricated the Supreme Command from the danger of visiting on Canada a second national tragedy only two years after the first, but it had also won an important victory. At the end of the day its forward elements stood deeper into France than those of any other division.

It had been a great day for Canadian arms and although there would be hard poundings ahead, the Canadian forces, working together on the sea, in the air and on land, were playing an important role in the great struggle to liberate Europe.

In the First World War Canadian formations had merged their identity into numbered groups. Now they were fighting again under their old battle flags and their traditional regimental designations, which rang like a roll call of the Canadian Army and the regions of Canada: The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, The Regina Rifle Regiment, Canadian Scottish, The Queen's Own Rifles, Le Regiment de la Chaudiere, The North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment, The Highland Light Infantry of Canada, The Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, The North Nova Scotia Highlanders, 17th Duke of York's Canadian Hussars, the 12th, 13th and 14th Regiments of the Royal Canadian Artillery, the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment, The Cameron Highlanders — these and other Canadian formations fought through France, Holland and Italy and, for some, on into Germany.

As struggle moved toward victory, there was a moment of irony at the scene of Canada's great tragedy. "On 30 August," Lieutenant-Colonel D.J. Goodspeed writes in *The Armed Forces of Canada,* "General Crerar directed the 2nd Canadian Corps upon Dieppe and on toward the Somme ... The 2nd Canadian Division, eager to avenge the repulse of 1942, was ordered to take Dieppe, but on 1 September the town was found to be undefended."

In this special issue of *The Beaver* we look back to Canada at war half a century ago. The ranks of those who fought that war are diminishing, year by year, but in bars, messes and departments of history across the Dominion the battles of Normandy are unfolding again as Canadians remember.

— Christopher Dafoe

ASSORO

Canadians in Battle, Sicily 1943

By George E. McElroy

One of the most audacious and surprising victories of the Second World War was the Battle of Assoro on 21-22 July 1943, just eleven days after the First Canadian Division, as part of General Bernard Law Montgomery's Eighth Army, landed at Pachino in Sicily.

Monty ordered the Canadians to advance through the mountainous region of central Sicily with the American 7th Army under General George Patton on their left and the 78th British Division on their right. After fighting their way through elements of the vaunted Herman Goering Division, the First and Second infantry brigades were given the objectives of Assoro and Leonforte respectively. These hilltop towns were situated on a formidable mountain feature which effectively blocked any further advance and could not be bypassed. They were defended by the crack, veteran 15th Panzer Grenadier Division of the German Army, well supported by artillery.

Assoro, the First Brigade's objective, was the key to the enemy's defence. High on a peak above the town were the ruins of an ancient fortress built by Roger II, the Norman who conquered Sicily in the twelfth century. According to legend, it had never been captured in all its 800-year history.

The vanguard battalion of the First Brigade was the Hastings & Prince Edward Regiment, a militia regiment from Eastern Ontario, better known as the "Plough Jockeys" or "Hasty Pees". As the battalion's Bren gun carriers began to ascend the narrow, twisting road leading towards Assoro, they came under heavy fire from machine guns, mortars and "eighty-eights" and were fortunate to withdraw and get under cover without casualties.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce Sutcliffe ordered his battalion to deploy before moving to the vicinity of a farm building in a grove of trees from where he could study the objective, still about three miles distant. He was accompanied by his Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Battle Cockin, a Cambridge University graduate on loan from the British. Soon they were joined by the Brigade Commander, Brigadier Howard Graham. Graham, a lawyer in civil life, had once commanded the Plough Jockeys and Sutcliffe had been his second-in-command. Their association and close friendship dated back to before the war when they had been militia officers in Trenton, Ontario. All the while these officers were studying the objective through their binoculars the enemy kept the valley under constant, if somewhat desultory, artillery fire from gun positions well to the rear of the Assoro-Leonforte massif. Obviously, any plan of attack would have to include effective counter-battery fire to have any chance of success.

The town of Assoro was now hidden from Graham and Sutcliffe by the rim of an escarpment that towered 1,000 metres above sea level. On a peak beyond the rim Roger the Norman's castle was starkly silhouetted against the northern sky. The road rose up the steep slope in a series of hairpin turns and was obviously covered by enemy fire for its entire length. It was safe to assume that it was also mined and cratered. Any attempt to make a frontal assault, using the road as an axis, would be suicidal. The steep, bare slopes to the left of the road also made a perfect enemy "killing ground".

The distant southeast face of the cliff below the castle looked sheer, but there was "considerable scrub and what appeared to be goat tracks in some places". "Bat" Cockin, who had experience mountain climbing in the Andes, thought it might be possible to scale. The main advantage of this approach was that it was least likely to be heavily defended. The disadvantages were that it would necessitate a night attack and a long, roundabout approach march over rugged terrain, possibly defended by enemy outposts and standing patrols. Haste would be essential in order to reach the base of the objective and climb to the top before surprise was lost. Even if this was accomplished, the Plough Jockeys, exhausted from their ordeal, would be heavily

Department of National Defence

A patrol of the Canadian First Infantry Division moves along a road near Ipsica, Sicily, during the 1943 advance. Local transport has been added to "Shank's mare" for the movement of heavy equipment.

outnumbered by Generalmajor Eberhard Rodt's 104th Regiment of Panzer Grenadiers. Nevertheless, a nocturnal "right hook" seemed to be the best choice.

Leaving Sutcliffe and Cockin to develop a plan, Graham departed, intending to drive back to Divisional HQ to request an artillery counter-battery programme. When he reached his office truck he found an enemy shell crater "about six feet deep and fifteen feet across" at the rear of the vehicle. Relieved that he hadn't been "at home" when the shell landed, he set out in his jeep for Division HQ.

The odds against success in the proposed operation were overwhelming and Graham's future as a senior Canadian army officer was bleak indeed. There was every chance that the Plough Jockeys would be slaughtered and would cease to exist as a fighting unit. In all likelihood, he would be relieved of his command, given an adverse report and released from the army. To Graham, who had served as an infantry private in France in the First World War, that would be a much worse fate than dying with his men. In addition to all this, there was the row he had had with Major-General Guy Simonds only six days earlier which resulted in Graham requesting to be relieved of his command and re-assigned. He was then ordered back to Corps HQ where he was interviewed by General Bernard Montgomery himself and asked to tell his side of the disagreement. Monty decided that Simonds and Graham were both at fault and ordered the latter to go back to his brigade and "get on with the battle". But the wounds were far from healed.

Just before reaching Division HQ, the Brigadier received an urgent message by wireless saying that Colonel Sutcliffe had been killed by shellfire and his intelligence officer mortally wounded. He immediately ordered his driver to turn around and head back for the "sharp end". At the battalion command post, he found Sutcliffe's second-in-command, Major the Lord Tweedsmuir, had already assumed command and was discussing the situation with his company commanders. This gave the brigadier still another reason to be pessimistic about the outcome of this whole star-crossed operation. "John Tweedsmuir", as he preferred to be called, was still very much an unknown quantity. Just days before the Plough Jockeys embarked for Sicily, their second-in-command, Major O'Connor Fenton, was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident. Lord Tweedsmuir was then posted to the battalion as the new second-in-command much to the annoyance of Graham and Sutcliffe who considered that there were several unit officers qualified for the appointment. All that was

"John Tweedsmuir" served in the Canadian North with the Hudson's Bay Company in the years before the war. His father, the first Lord Tweedsmuir, was the author John Buchan and Governor General of Canada.

known about Tweedsmuir was that he was the son of the late Governor General (John Buchan), had been educated at Eton and Oxford, had served in Africa in the British Colonial Service and had been with the Hudson's Bay Company at Cape Dorset on Baffin Island before joining the army in 1939 and going overseas with the First Canadian Division. Since coming to the Plough Jockeys he had proved himself to be a likable chap and a good administrator but, as far as Graham knew, he had never so much as commanded a platoon, let alone a battalion. It was therefore with considerable misgiving that Graham confirmed him as the Plough Jockeys' new commanding officer.

At dusk the Plough Jockeys buried Bruce Sutcliffe and "Bat" Cockin in a corner of a field beside the road in graves marked by wooden crosses made by the battalion's pioneer platoon. Later, the bodies would be lifted and moved to a permanent military cemetery. Then as a diversion to mask the departure of the attacking force, three Bren gun carriers from the 48th Highlanders were sent racing up the road towards Assoro. They got halfway to the village before the enemy opened up on them with everything from machine guns to eighty-eights. As ordered, the Highlanders high-tailed it back to safety just as the divisional artillery began a four-hour programme of harassing fire. Half an hour later the Plough Jockeys crossed the start line and began their long, arduous approach march. The battalion was led by a special assault company of picked volunteers carrying only its weapons, ammunition and full water bottles. The company commander was Major Alex Campbell, who had been attached to the British First Army in North Africa before returning to the United Kingdom in time to take part in the invasion of Sicily.

Campbell hated the enemy and was obsessed with the idea of avenging the death of his father, killed in the First World War. Less than a week before Campbell, leading his company and firing a Bren gun from the hip, had charged a column of enemy vehicles with the result that more than 100 Herman Goerings were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. Campbell personally accounted for twenty.

Lieutenant Farley "Squib" Mowat, destined to become a famous author, was one of the platoon commanders selected by Campbell for the assault company. This vanguard was followed by Lord Tweedsmuir, his second-in-command, Major "Ack Ack" Kennedy, Regimental Sergeant-Major Angus Duffy, signallers and a mule heavily burdened with the type of wireless set usually carried in a tank. Tweedsmuir had insisted that his set be taken along because he had found that the smaller, more portable infantry sets had very limited ranges in the mountains and were often out of communication. Behind this "O" (orders) Group, the remainder of the Plough Jockeys were stretched out in single file like a mile-long line of sleep walkers stumbling and groping their way through the mountainous maze of steep-sided gullies, craggy ridges and boulder-strewn slopes. Haste was essential in order to reach and scale the face of the objective before dawn, yet throughout the punishing march there was the ever-present danger of blundering into an enemy outpost or patrol. Once, the battalion's scouts came upon a recently-vacated machine-gun post in which were found crusts of fresh bread. Another false alarm was caused by a young Sicilian boy driving a herd of goats.

Daylight was less than an hour away when the Plough Jockeys reached a rocky ridge beyond which a deep ravine separated them from the objective which loomed high above into the paling darkness. By the time the troops had climbed down to the bottom of the ravine they had almost reached the limit of their endurance. The mule carrying the heavy wireless set died from exhaustion. Lord Tweedsmuir describes what followed: "Then began a climb which no one who took part will ever forget. The mountain was terraced and always above was a tantalizing false crest, which unfolded to another crest when one approached it. It was forty sweating, tearing minutes before we stood on the top beside the shell of the great Norman castle and

Canadian War Museum

"On the Hill at Assoro, Sicily, 24 July 1943", from a water-colour by Captain W.A. Ogilvie. The ruins of the Norman castle loom above the Canadian soldiers. In the foreground Major-General Guy Simonds observes fighting at Agira.

realized that we had achieved complete surprise. A German O.P. party had fallen to the left hand group and we had a vantage point from which we could see for fifty miles."

"Squib" Mowat's platoon was the first to reach an enemy observation post manned by a German artillery sergeant and three panzer grenadiers. The sergeant made a grab for his pistol but Private A.K. Long, one of Mowat's men, cut him down with a short burst from his "Tommy" gun. The other Germans were quick to surrender.

Standing on the hilltop, Tweedsmuir paused to admire the magnificent view when a sniper's bullet narrowly missed him. He quickly scrambled for cover and received a stern lecture from RSM Angus Duffy. "We lost one commanding officer yesterday," he growled. "We can't afford to lose another one today. Don't push your luck, sir."

There was now sufficient daylight to see the enemy soldiers in the village below at their morning ablutions and making preparations for breakfast. Also, a column of about a dozen enemy vehicles was approaching along the road from the direction of Leonforte. As the Plough Jockeys swarmed on to "Castle Hill", they opened fire on the trucks which halted as their drivers sought cover in the ditch. This alerted the Germans in the village who began returning the Canadians' fire with rifles, machine guns, 20.mm light anti-aircraft guns and mortars. Minutes later ranging rounds from enemy artillery began falling on Castle Hill and developed into a punishing bombardment. "I lay flat on my belly behind a section of stone fence," Mowat later wrote in his book *And No Birds Sang,* "scrabbling at the rock-hard ground with my tin hat in a frenzied attempt to burrow into the heart of the mountain."

Fortunately, when Mowat's platoon captured the enemy OP, the equipment included a tripod-mounted pair of scissors-type 20-power binoculars. These were put to good use by Major "Ack Ack" Kennedy, who had once been trained as an artillery officer. By means of the powerful wireless set that two burly signallers had managed to manhandle up the cliff, he reported the exact locations of the enemy gun positions and the 7th Medium Regiment, RCA, began plastering the enemy guns with murderously accurate fire from their .155s.

As the firefight raged, the Plough Jockeys found it increasingly difficult to keep on fighting. Their only

Lieutenant Farley "Squib" Mowat takes a break during the Sicilian campaign, 1943.

food was the emergency chocolate rations each man carried, their water bottles were nearly empty and they were running short of ammunition. The heat was becoming intolerable. Tweedsmuir later said that his soldiers "lay and suffered in that heat. The skin of our faces and arms and legs was scorched by the sun. Our heads were swimming with heat and exhaustion.... The rocks were too hot to touch, and so was the metal of their weapons. We had practically no water."

RSM Angus Duffy volunteered to try to get back to Brigade HQ and lead back a party carrying food, water and ammunition. Captain Bill Stockloser offered to accompany him. "We had to descend from Assoro in broad daylight if we were to get a carrying party back that night," Duffy recalled. "It was almost certain that the enemy had closed the ring at the bottom of Assoro where we had come through the night before. Even if we did get through to Brigade HQ and get a carrying party, we had to return about 7 miles and climb the bloody hill again. No one could have that much luck!"

Expecting at every moment to come under fire, Duffy and Stockloser clambered down the cliff and set out on their long cross-country trek. "We made short dashes from cover to cover," Duffy remembers. "God it's an awful feeling moving with your back to the enemy, expecting a blast any minute!"

They arrived at First Brigade HQ at dusk and reported to Brigadier Graham. With him was Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Crowe, who offered to send two companies of the Royal Canadian Regiment. *The Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume II,* describes what followed: "Early morning of the 22nd brought much needed food and ammunition.... At midnight, one hundred volunteers of The Royal Canadian Regiment, and bearing a full day's rations and ammunition in Everest packs and bandoliers, set off across country, escorted by another RCR company as precaution against enemy intervention. Led by the two intrepid messengers they reached the mountain top without detection by the enemy and returned to their unit without incident. In and about the ruins of the ancient castle the Hastings ate their first meal in thirty-six hours."

"We were now well fed and well enough armed to deal with anything," Lord Tweedsmuir stated in his account of the battle. "At midday the road was cleared. Reinforcements came up as the Huns had now drawn back from the ground immediately overlooking the town. The wounded were evacuated and the Brig came up to see us. He was lyrical with excitement. The Huns started to shell the road below, shooting just over the castle. The Brig continued his conversation lying on his face. The rest of the day we took it easy. We were very cheerful. Assoro was to be made a battle honour. We asked permission to move off the hill to a more restful area, but it was refused. We slept well that night."

The enemy withdrawal from the town enabled the Plough Jockeys to move about more freely. One soldier, who had been a barber in Picton before the war, found an empty barber shop and opened up for business. A well in the village square was the only source of drinking water and a number of soldiers were congregated in its vicinity when a salvo of enemy shells exploded nearby. Three Plough Jockeys and an artillery signaller died instantly. Five other soldiers were wounded. RSM Duffy suffered a slight wound on the hand and went to the Regimental Aid Post to have it dressed. He was evacuated to the Field Dressing Station where he collapsed from exhaustion and was sent to a British hospital in Syracuse.

In his memoirs *Citizen and Soldier* Lieutenant-General Howard Graham recalls: "Later in the day, the road up the escarpment having been repaired and swept for mines, I took Major-General Simonds to the top in my jeep, and as we rounded one of the hairpin turns, we beheld a character in very short shorts, no shirt, a rifle slung over his back, crowned with a black silk top hat. This creature was on traffic control, and I recognized him as one of my former Plough Jockeys from North Hastings! Being well-disciplined, he raised his silk topper and bowed from the waist. I could not help

The cockpit of war, 1943

smiling at his spirit and attitude, and gave him a V for Victory sign. But the GOC was not amused, and a few days later an order was issued that troops were to be properly dressed at all times!"

An enemy appraisal of the Plough Jockeys' performance, which obviously referred to Assoro, was contained in a report written by the Commander of the 15th Panzer Division: "In fieldcraft superior to our own troops. Very mobile at night, surprise break-ins, clever infiltration at night with small groups between our strongpoints."

The *Official History* comments as follows: "The seizure of the Assoro pinnacle by the Hastings & Prince Edward was as significant to the Canadian Division's advance as it was dramatic, for it upset the whole German plan of defence on that front and thus hastened the fall of Leonforte. Assoro and Leonforte were two phases of the same battle: for the enemy had to hold the whole ridge or withdraw from it altogether."

After such a successful action as this, decorations for distinguished service and gallantry would normally be awarded as a matter of course but even though Lord Tweedsmuir was recommended for the Distinguished Service Order and RSM Angus Duffy for the Canada Medal these awards were not approved. In fact, none of the Plough Jockeys, either officers or men, received awards. When Major-General Simonds vetoed Tweedsmuir's DSO, he is reported to have said that "Assoro was a good show for a first time in command but there would be lots of future chances for him to win a DSO." ◆

Writer and soldier George E. McElroy lives in Oakville, Ontario.

The Conscription Crisis

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?

By J.E. Rea

In all the accounts of Canada's final conscription crisis of the Second World War, one image has been indelibly etched by historians. At the dramatic Cabinet meeting of 1 November 1944, Colonel J.L. Ralston, Minister of National Defence, was ruthlessly sacrificed by Prime Minister Mackenzie King to avoid the politically dangerous decision to send overseas the trained men conscripted for home defence under the National Resources Mobilization Act. The abrupt sacking of Ralston was a pre-emptive strike by King, so swift and unexpected that Ralston's supporters were shocked into confused and helpless silence as the gallant soldier left the council room. King is the villain of the piece, cast as a duplicitous schemer determined to root out dissent, cow his fractious Cabinet and avert political disaster.

Ralston, on the other hand, is treated almost reverentially. Donald Creighton, admittedly no admirer of the Prime Minister, describes Ralston as "a selfless and devoted patriot." After the dismissal, he went on, Ralston "confirmed his resignation, got up, said goodbye to his colleagues, and left the room. He went alone. Not one of the conscriptionist ministers followed him. King had succeeded in cutting off the venomous head of the conspiratorial snake". J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, in *Broken Promises,* are even more graphic: "The Council Chamber was quiet as Ralston, a gentleman and a soldier, rose, said he would hand in his resignation, shook hands, and left the room. The Cabinet sat in silence, stunned by the swift brutality with which King had applied the axe. None of Ralston's supporters moved a muscle or made to follow the departing Minister of National Defence. King's seizure of the psychological moment had been supremely calculated". Colonel C.P. Stacey was more laconic: "He went alone. The Prime Minister's tactical plan had been a complete success. The conscriptionists, totally taken by surprise, were in no position to act together".

This is strong and dramatic history with no room for shades of meaning. King is the insensitive manipulator who brutally dismisses Ralston about whom floats an aura of tragic nobility, integrity and selflessness. His conscriptionist colleagues were stunned, distracted and overwhelmed. Quite apart from the fact that these accounts seem to place King's capacity for devious intrigue on quite another plane, there is an assumption that underpins them all that may be quite problematic. All the authors presume that the policy of sending conscripts overseas is identified exclusively with Ralston. To put it more directly, to support conscription was to support Ralston; to support Ralston was to support conscription. MacGregor Dawson, who was the first historian to examine the crisis, makes this point explicitly: "Thus while the Government could ill afford to lose a man of Ralston's inherent honesty and steadfast devotion, it could no longer afford to keep him unless it was

willing to embrace conscription". Dawson's entire argument, in which he appears to some extent to be an apologist for King, presumes that the conscriptionist ministers viewed Ralston and the policy as quite inseparable. But was this, in fact, the case? Did those ministers who favoured overseas conscription view Ralston as the necessary touchstone for the policy? There is enough evidence, it seems to me, to cast considerable doubt upon this presumption and to allow us to make a more qualified judgement of the Defence Minister's standing with his colleagues. Such a case depends not only on the circumstances of the autumn of 1944, but on Ralston's performance as Defence Minister throughout the war and the perception of that performance by his colleagues.

J.L. Ralston accepted the portfolio of National Defence in June of 1940 with considerable reluctance. He had been happy and effective in Finance where he had succeeded Charles Dunning at the outbreak of the war. The tragic and untimely death of Defence Minister Norman Rogers, however, forced King to re-organize his government and Ralston could hardly refuse, given his own military background, his previous experience in the Defence portfolio and the pressing needs of the ministry. In any case, Finance would be left in the hands of his particular friend and fellow Nova Scotian, J.L. Ilsley. These changes took place only weeks after the German *blitzkrieg* was launched in May 1940. The character of the war changed immediately. The Cabinet War Committee (CWC) authorized the formation of a

Winnipeg Free Press

Colonel Victor Sifton, newspaper owner and Master-General of the Ordnance.

Canadian Corps with a Third Infantry Division to be sent overseas. This was followed by the formation of the most important units of a Fourth Division, its nine rifle battalions. After the fall of France, Canada became vital to the defence of Britain.

As recruiting went forward in 1940, the Army's planners began to prepare the Army Programme for 1941. Their starting point seems to have been the wishes, if not the direct request, of the Imperial General Staff for a substantial Canadian ground force. It never seems to have occurred to Ralston to question the wisdom or the accuracy of the British position or to consider the capacity of Canada to respond to the suggestions of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS). His own advisors, especially Generals H.D.G. Crerar and Andrew McNaughton, seemed only too willing to recommend a rapid build-up of the Canadian Army. They envisioned, at that time, three infantry divisions, a tank brigade and an armoured division to follow. The Fourth Infantry Division was reinstated and plans made for a further division for home defence. Ralston visited the United Kingdom in the winter of 1940-41 and returned anxious to promote a further increase. His position did not change as a result of Churchill's famous speech in Glasgow on 9 February 1941 in which he said "give us the tools and we'll finish the job". Several of Ralston's Cabinet colleagues were listening more attentively, especially C.D. Howe and T.A. Crerar, and they reacted quite negatively to Ralston's insistence that more troops, plus a tank battalion, should be sent to Britain since British troops were now heavily engaged in North Africa. The Prime Minister was exceedingly cautious, as always, remarking that Howe, who also returned from Britain in late January, 1941 "had a truer picture of the inside of the situation than Ralston". This opinion, of course, could be more welcome since it was more agreeable to King.

But herein lay the essence of the division within Cabinet that would fester and grow for nearly four years, a division provoked by two connected problems. What was Canada's most useful and important role in the war, to provide direct military support or to maximize its productive capacity for the materials of war? And behind this, obviously, lay the prospect of a necessity to use conscription for overseas service if a large army was authorized. None of this is new, but this background must always condition an examination of Ralston's standing with his colleagues.

Hence the reaction of certain members of the Cabinet to the dismissal of Ralston in 1944 can be traced back to 1941. During that summer a long, bitter and tense debate began over the need for and the implications of what became know as the "Big Army". As early as May 1941, there was a discussion about conscription in Cabinet War Committee, the powerful inner group which directed the war effort, in which Ralston asked that it not be completely rejected in all circumstances. Ernest Lapointe promptly said he would resign, as did James Gardiner. "Others present said nothing one way or the other, they being [Chubby] Power, [T.A.] Crerar and Ilsley".

We know a good deal about how that debate developed and its legacy until 1944. Political and official Ottawa was not a large community and friendships crossed boundaries easily. For example, Victor Sifton, of the Winnipeg Siftons, was Ralston's Master-General of the Ordnance. He was quite intimate with Grant Dexter, the *Winnipeg Free Press* representative in Ottawa. Dexter, in turn, was very close to T.A. Crerar, deputy-chairman of Cabinet War Committee, as was Sifton for that matter. All of them were in touch with J.W. Dafoe back at the *Free Press.* King, of course, knew this as well, and even used the connection when it suited his purpose. This complex of relationships — there were others, such as the Nova Scotians in Ottawa — allows us a revealing glimpse of how Ralston appeared to his fellow Cabinet members since what should have been private information was often known

Department of National Defence

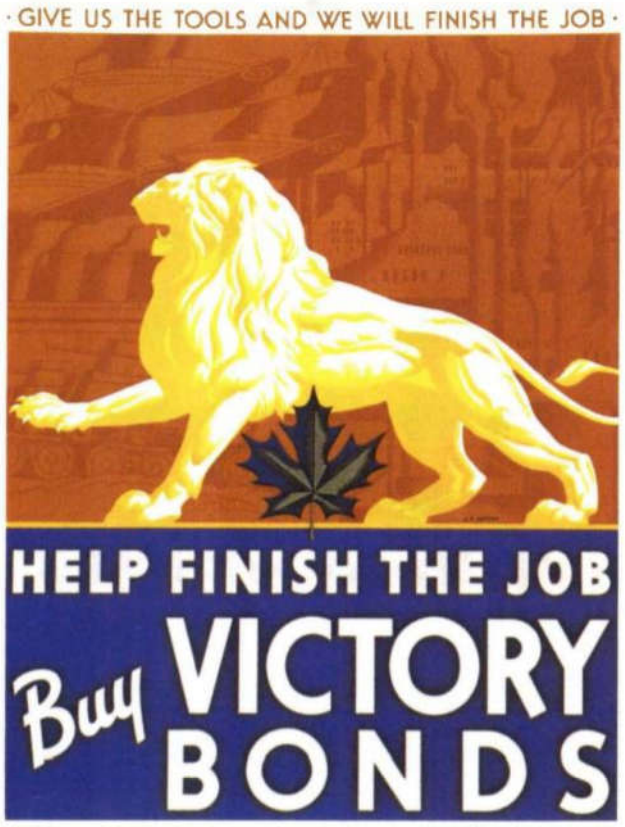
Winston Churchill, surrounded by military leaders, visits the First Canadian Army at the front, March 1945. From left to right: General H.D.G. Crerar, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, General Guy Simonds, Churchill, two unidentified officers and Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery.

to many. As the 1942 Army Programme was being developed in the summer of 1941, Sifton was keenly opposed to expansion. As Dexter reported to Dafoe, "[Sifton] is very much against a big army. He can't make Ralston see that the gang (especially Generals [H.D.G.] Crerar and [Andrew] McNaughton) are putting it over him by increasing the establishment surreptitiously".

Ralston, however, was pushing ahead. On the strength of the Adjutant-General's survey of manpower he suggested to CWC in July that there were enough men to mobilize eight divisions, with six for overseas. His advisors were full of assurance. General Crerar, who was Chief of the General Staff that summer, informed McNaughton that "our departmental appreciation indicates that manpower is available to maintain a Canadian Army of eight Divisions, of which two will be in Canada for a war period of over six years from now". He was confident "that the numbers for the Army are there, without interfering with essential industry and other home activities *providing the Government take the steps required to get these numbers into the Services.* I fully admit that this is a pretty ambitious proposal ... I do not think it an impossible one". Ralston appears to have swallowed it whole.

The proposal went to the Cabinet War Committee on 29 July, where Ralston played his cards closely. According to Dexter, Ralston "merely put it before the Cabinet. The proposal calls for two more divisions. [CWC] turned it down cold, deciding to restrict the army for the time being to an overseas force of [four divisions and a tank brigade]. This is the present setup". Angus Macdonald, Minister for Naval Services, complained later to Dexter and T.A. Crerar that the priorities were all wrong. "Our first need is ships. Without ships we can't do anything. Next came air force, then navy, then war industry generally and army last". It appears, this early, that Ralston was perceived by some of his closest colleagues as the uncritical spokesman for the Army and, to a degree, somewhat isolated in Cabinet.

In September 1941, Ralston was advised by General H.D.G. Crerar that the 1942 Programme — now comprising three Infantry and two Armoured Divisions — could be supported by voluntary enlistment. The following month the two men went to Britain where the Defence Minister was informed by the British that the second Armoured Division would be required. With five divisions, two tank brigades and ancillary troops, the British then suggested to McNaughton the creation



This famous Victory Bond poster by artist A.J. Casson included Churchill's call for assistance from North America.

of an Army Headquarters and he so wired Ralston in December. At no point does it appear that Ralston ever questioned the appropriateness of the British requests or the advice given him by his staff officers. Nor does he seem to have asked himself just how large an army Canada could or should support through voluntary service.

What was, indeed, the appropriate sizes given our population of eleven and one-half million in 1942, our financial commitments to the air training scheme and the desperate need for agricultural and industrial production? It was a moot question, at this time, whether Ralston shared in Cabinet and civilian control of the military or represented the Army in Cabinet. But in retrospect this initial fault was a collective one. The Cabinet never addressed this obvious question. Without any firm position on the optimum size of the overseas army there was little chance of imposing effective Cabinet control on the ambitions of the General Staff. This was the final form of the Army Programme for 1942 but its adoption was debated in radically altered circumstances.

In November 1941 the Conservatives chose Arthur Meighen to lead their party once again. On 7 December, with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, the war spread to the Pacific and drew in the United States. Both events seriously affected the debate on the Big Army which then took place.

Meighen's return to the Commons promised to exacerbate the situation. As T.A. Crerar wrote to J.W. Dafoe, "The Conservative party are out for conscription of men for overseas service and it appears reasonable to assume that Meighen will drive for this with all his force, regardless of the consequences that are bound to follow ... to throw the country into a turmoil of dissension in order to raise, at the outside a few more divisions is very short-sighted and lacking in a clear understanding of what is essential to the defeat of Germany." It was not a question of men for the Army he told Dafoe: "Germany's successes have been due entirely to her superiority in equipment". Mechanized warfare was the key to success. "When Stalin makes a speech, it is equipment he pleads for, not men; when Churchill speaks it is the same thing. If we cannot build ships enough, Britain may well be starved out". T.A. Crerar concluded this long and rather dispirited letter with a clear statement of his own view of the situation. "... if I were convinced that conscription of men for service overseas was the most effective contribution which Canada could make to the defeat of Hitler, I would be for it, but I am convinced that, at the present time at any rate and so far ahead as I can see, it would not produce this result — indeed, a result vastly different." Simultaneously, C.D. Howe argued strongly for continuation of the voluntary system until war industries became fully operational. But Meighen's reappearance would certainly make overseas conscription a central question in Canada's war plans.

The Cabinet War Committee began to deal directly with the Big Army proposal on 2 December 1941. Ralston now made it quite clear that he favoured the plan of a two corps Canadian Army, even if conscription was necessary to achieve it. Macdonald and Ilsley said nothing; Power was absent and Howe was in Washington. According to Dexter, it "became a tussle between T.A. [Crerar] and Ralston", with Crerar arguing that the major effort should be placed on production and the development of air and sea power, a position with which King heartily agreed. The next day, the new CGS, General Kenneth Stuart, assured the CWC that the 1942 Programme could be accomplished with voluntary enlistment, but it changed few opinions. Crerar was more affected by Victor Sifton's comment of the previous evening that he was "troubled by Ralston's subservience to the general staff". Clearly, neither of them trusted the generals.

Japan's entry into the war was a second factor affecting the debate. The fear of attack on the West Coast, however improbable it was in fact, provoked demands for the deployment of troops to British Columbia. The Prime Minister felt two divisions would be required.

According to Dexter, this could "direct attention from the overseas front and place the big army plan in cold storage".

But it was not to be. Victor Sifton informed Dexter that at meetings of the military members of Cabinet, Generals H.D.G. Crerar and Kenneth Stuart declared there was no possibility of attack on the Pacific coast "and that the entry of Japan does not call for the transfer of any considerable body of troops. They believe it must not be allowed to interfere with the major plan. If Ralston takes their line, it is conceivable that there could still be trouble". There was little understanding or sympathy among the military for the political forces at work in the country.

But the expansion of the war would obviously increase the demand on manpower for both civilian and military purposes. King was so concerned that he quizzed the entire Cabinet as to their views on conscription during Council meetings in mid-December. The critical question was the wisdom of proceeding with the Big Army in view of the changed circumstances. When pressed, Ralston could not say whether the Programme could be met with voluntary enlistments; but he argued that it must be met, even if it meant conscription.

When the debate on the Big Army resumed on 16 December 1941, Ralston's credibility was badly shaken when the manpower projections indicating that plenty of men were available were found to be seriously flawed. When challenged on this, Ralston had to apologize but insisted, according to Dexter, "that this was purely academic" and the Programme must go ahead. The old debate then flared up again. King and others pointing out that "the general staff itself had said that the most important effect of Japan's attack would be the diversion of equipment by the United States from Britain and Russia to its own needs". The men *versus* material argument still flourished. But Ralston went on doggedly declaring that "the Army believed the six divisions overseas could be supported by the voluntary system". When T.A. Crerar pointed out that this was based on inaccurate projections and that the voluntary system might fail, Ralston replied that he would then recommend whatever measures were necessary, including conscription. They were clearly at an impasse. Even though Ralston's arguments were based on suspect figures, the opponents of the Big Army had no better information and thus were increasingly under pressure to accept the advice of the military.

The Government, pushed by Ralston and his advisors, were moving into politically dangerous waters. If the Big Army proposal was accepted, there was the evident possibility that voluntary enlistments would not meet the demand. The ministry would somehow then have to escape its commitment not to conscript for overseas service. Hence discussion began on a plebiscite to seek release from the promise of no compulsory service abroad. The opponents of the army proposal were not at all enthusiastic. T.A. Crerar pointed out, quite accurately, that, even if successful, a plebiscite would simply postpone the problem, not solve it.

The climax of this stage of the debate came on 5 January 1942 at Cabinet. Despite a last-minute attempt by Crerar to reject the addition of a second armoured division and concentrate on production, the Big Army proposal was accepted. Even so, when directly confronted, Ralston would not concede that this would be the final shape of the overseas army "though he would hope and expect that such would be the case". Dexter's account of the event, drawn largely from Crerar, suggests the assumption that Ralston went to the Prime Minister and threatened to resign if the Programme was not approved. "King has bowed to Ralston", Dexter informed the *Free Press*, "and told T.A. prior to yesterday's meeting that he thought there was no alternative but to accept Ralston's Programme and take a chance on the experts being right. T.A. is deeply disappointed and relationships apparently are badly strained all round. Ralston is scarcely speaking to him". Near the end of January, King made the announcement in the House. But the legacy was a divided Cabinet and War Committee. Ralston's relentless pressure on the moderate anti-conscriptionists, including Howe and Crerar at this time, left them "very suspicious of [Ralston] — believing that he mistrusts his colleagues, has small use for the government, [and] is the tool of the generals who will never be satisfied however large the army is."

The Defence Minister's reputation suffered as well as a result of his estrangement from General

William Lyon Mackenzie King and Colonel J.L. Ralston, his Minister of National Defence.

Mackenzie King reviews Canadian troops in England, 1941. The officer in the trench-coat is General Andrew McNaughton, then leading Canadian forces in Europe and later Colonel Ralston's replacement as Minister of National Defence.

McNaughton. The personal hostility between the two was deplored even by such a usually firm supporter of Ralston as Angus Macdonald. There was a more dangerous disagreement between the two as well. While Ralston was insisting during War Committee's discussions of Selective Service that the most important task facing the government was to get more men for the army, McNaughton expressed satisfaction at the level of support for the military. Indeed, he considered the army complete except for replacements. Ralston appeared to be growing more and more inflexible and his notorious reputation as being always buried in detail was exasperating his colleagues. Crerar, for one, considered him a "'national disaster' as minister of national defence and should be removed. But while Ralston's incapacity as an executive makes him impossible in that portfolio", Dexter went on, "T.A. is very just. He appreciates Ralston's integrity and patriotism. There is, he conceded, nothing finer in the way of character than Ralston". Howe, for his part, exploded in the House of Commons, protesting at the large numbers being called to the army, claiming production would suffer and Canada's contribution to ultimate victory would be weakened. Even Angus Macdonald, an "ardent friend of Ralston's", agreed that the Defence Minister "went too far". But Macdonald was deeply suspicious that King and the French Canadian ministers were using the argument of war production for purely political considerations.

While the tension in the War Committee continued, the focus shifted to the plebiscite to be held on 27 April 1942. It was not so much the vote itself, which was expected to carry at least nationally, but what King would wish to do with the result. He appears to have had an open mind going in to the canvass. The massive rejection of the appeal in Quebec, however, shook him greatly. Most of the Cabinet were of the opinion that some definite scheme of implementation was expected and must be considered. It seems to have been Crerar who first proposed the scheme to repeal Section Three of the Mobilization Act, which precluded compulsory service abroad, but not to use conscripts overseas until the voluntary system failed.

The details of the ensuing debate which led up to Ralston's letter of resignation in the summer of 1942 are well known and its significance can be summarized in two related issues. King took the position that overseas conscription would be imposed by Order-in-Council only after Parliament had given its approval. At this, Ralston submitted his resignation, since he had consistently argued that the sole issue was to get more men for the Army and a return to Parliament was now unnecessary. Professor Granatstein has neatly described King's manoeuverings to paper-over the crisis. The Prime Minister announced that the issue of conscription would not again be debated. If it became necessary it would be imposed by Order-in-Council under the authority of Bill 80, and a vote of confidence taken in

the House. It should be added here, however, that the members of this experienced and shrewd inner Cabinet all were aware that the key word here was "necessary". For Ralston, pushed by his military advisors, it meant necessary to maintain the Army in the field at authorized strength. For King, it meant necessary to win the war. This, ultimately, was an unbridgeable gulf, not simply a dispute about procedure. With the United States assuming the leadership in a world war, a few thousand inexperienced soldiers from Canada, thrown in hastily some time in an undetermined future, would weigh little in the balance. T.A. Crerar was dead right, as Granatstein has reiterated; the crisis was not resolved by the plebiscite and its aftermath, only postponed.

The pressure from the military on Ralston for more men did not cease, nor did the Minister of Defence ever question their demands. C.D. Howe, meanwhile, was insisting that civilian manpower in all crucial sectors, war industry, steel, mining, lumbering and others be frozen. In October of 1942, for example, Howe demanded that the forestry troops be brought back from Britain to harvest British Columbia spruce which both Canada and Britain desperately needed. Ralston responded rather weakly that it would impair morale overseas. Employment in this sector was frozen over Ralston's objections. According to Dexter, "Howe hit Ralston like a tank ... T.A. [Crerar] did not even have to open his mouth". The unremitting battles over manpower could go to ridiculous lengths. The Prime Minister complained at the end of 1942 that the decision to ration butter "comes down again to too large an Army. They have been buying up most of the butter".

The new year would bring little respite. On 6 January 1943 the Cabinet War Committee confirmed the new Army programme of maintaining two Corps of five Divisions and ancillary units in Europe; a total that would require 5,000 men every month to sustain. But the national manpower situation deteriorated steadily, if slowly. Even Power at Air Force and Macdonald at Navy were beginning to experience shortages, especially the former who complained of declining air crews. But the major battles occurred between Howe and Ralston. In the spring of 1943 they quarrelled continuously over men for the coal mines. Howe, at one point, said he could not go on, as the lack of miners was affecting steel production as well as fuel supplies. Ralston was equally adamant that men should not be sheltered in any industries. Even Angus Macdonald seemed inclined to support Howe in these encounters. After all, the Navy required supplies as well. Ralston's isolation increased as he stubbornly repeated his demands for more men. He lost his struggle that summer to widen the age limits for eligible men (from 19 to 18 for single men and from 24 to 30 for married men), and other temporizing measures seemed to bring no relief from the constant bickering. It was only the Normandy invasion of June 1944 which changed the mood, if only briefly.

The breakout from the invasion beaches and the swift thrust across northern France made the end of the war appear tantalizingly near. That it would end without political collapse in Canada over conscription seemed assured when General Stuart reported to the CWC in early August that operations were everywhere successful and that "the reinforcement situation was very satisfactory". The euphoria lasted until mid-September when King hosted a meeting of Churchill and Roosevelt in Quebec City where much of the talk was concerned with the post-war world and its problems.

Relieved by the passing of the poisoned chalice of

conscription, King's mood was unrestrained in an off-the-record speech to the Quebec Reform Club. His text was a belated eulogy to Ernest Lapointe who had died just prior to Pearl Harbour. His memory to the Prime Minister was ever-fresh. He would honour Lapointe's pledge to Quebec — no conscription for overseas service. No government led by him would ever impose compulsory service abroad. Despite plebiscites and Bill 80s, there had been no conscription and there never would be. Grant Dexter concluded a rather biting account of this extraordinary speech by noting "The conscriptionists — Ralston, Angus and the rest, were sitting right at the head table. You can imagine their feelings. Even T.A. who was always the Col's opponent on the army, found it too much". While the rhetoric

may have been over-blown, even ill-advised, it was not inconsistent. King had always maintained that conscription would only be justified if it were necessary to win the war. With the massive armies of the allies rolling across Western Europe what weight would a few thousand Canadian conscripts have in the balance? But it is an open question as to how many, if any, other members of the Cabinet War Committee saw the issue in precisely the same terms as the Prime Minister.

If positions had changed prior to late September among King's principal advisors, it was little evident. A discussion took place in CWC about demobilizing the home defence forces raised by the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) now that any attack on Canada was clearly unlikely. Ralston took a singular position which even Macdonald and Ilsley found extreme, at least according to King. The Defence Minster argued that General Service men ought to be released first in order to get any jobs available in a tight labour market. King, of course, suspected that Ralston simply wanted the so-called "Zombies" kept on to the very last minute in case conscription should become necessary. Ralston left for Europe soon after in the wake of reports that the reinforcement situation was not as satisfactory as had been forecast.

What he found disturbed him mightily. The Canadian Army had been given the difficult and costly task of clearing the Scheldt estuary in Holland. In addition, casualty projections by the Army Staff were badly in error. They were based on inaccurate British military estimates, apparently drawn from their experience in North Africa, which the Canadian General Staff took without question and passed on to Ralston. They were now faced, not with a manpower problem, but an infantry crisis. This was little comfort for those Cabinet members like Crerar who distrusted all generals. When he returned to CWC on 18 October 1944, Ralston gave as his considered opinion that it was now time to implement Bill 80 and send the NRMA men overseas or the army could not be maintained at strength. When pressed by the Prime Minister, as King noted in his diary, Ralston conceded that "it was not the winning of the war that was at stake. To my mind, that is the only stake on which we are justified." Ralston, pushed by his military advisors, never viewed the problem this way. He saw his responsibility as due to the Army, not Cabinet policy; and, in a sense, it could be no other way by this point since throughout his tenure of the office he was less a Cabinet colleague than a spokesman for the General Staff on the conduct of the war. He should probably have resigned at that point.

During the last week of October the Cabinet War Committee struggled with the question of conscription. Howe was impatient as always. He had opposed the Big Army from the outset but now he seemed to want only an end to the interminable wrangling in Cabinet. T.A. Crerar had just returned, gloomy and dispirited, from a tour of the West where opinion seemed to demand that the NRMA men be sent overseas. "He had opposed increases in the army at every stage", King reported to his diary, "but now he felt that the Zombies ought to be sent overseas. He thought all the defence departments were no good and said so right along". Rumours among the inner circle that King was about to replace Ralston with General A.G.L. McNaughton brought a revealing comment from Louis St. Laurent, that "everyone had great confidence in the General [McNaughton] *and would accept his view of what was, or was not, necessary*". It is an obvious inference that Ralston's views no longer commanded the same respect.

With only St. Laurent and Michaud firmly with him in CWC, King suspended meetings of the inner Cabinet until 9 November 1944. The issue would be determined in full Council where King estimated there were "thirteen ministers with him and eight with Ralston." This estimate, drawn from King's diary and repeated both by Colonel Stacey and Professor Granatstein, is as suspect as many of King's speculations. It also presumes the identification of Ralston with the policy of sending the NRMA men overseas.

On 1 November, the climax came at Council. Chubby Power, whom King considered a potential, if undeclared, supporter of Ralston, was in hospital. But Power had long before promised his constituents that he would never support conscription and when it was imposed, he left the government. In a meeting that morning with the Governor General, King reported that Ilsley had said "that he could not face the people of Nova Scotia with both Angus and Ralston out, without joining them." In other words, Ralston's fate was not critical to Ilsley's decision. He would stay if Angus Macdonald stayed. The latter, incidentally, was convinced that Ilsley would not resign. King had also telephoned T.A. Crerar before Council and suggested that he should not "say anything committing himself as to what he will do if certain people did certain things," a reference that is not entirely clear. It could refer to Ralston or himself. Crerar, according to King, was "evasive". Crerar's own account recalls "I said that I was interested only in getting the problem solved in the right way", which King may well have felt was ominous as well as evasive. Despite all his battles with Ralston, C.D. Howe now simply wanted the issue to go away. His mind had already turned to reconstruction. Colin Gibson and William Mulock were for conscription with or without Ralston, as they had been all along. There is no clear evidence as to Angus Macdonald's decision to remain when Ralston left. What the so-called "conscriptionist ministers" were adamant about,

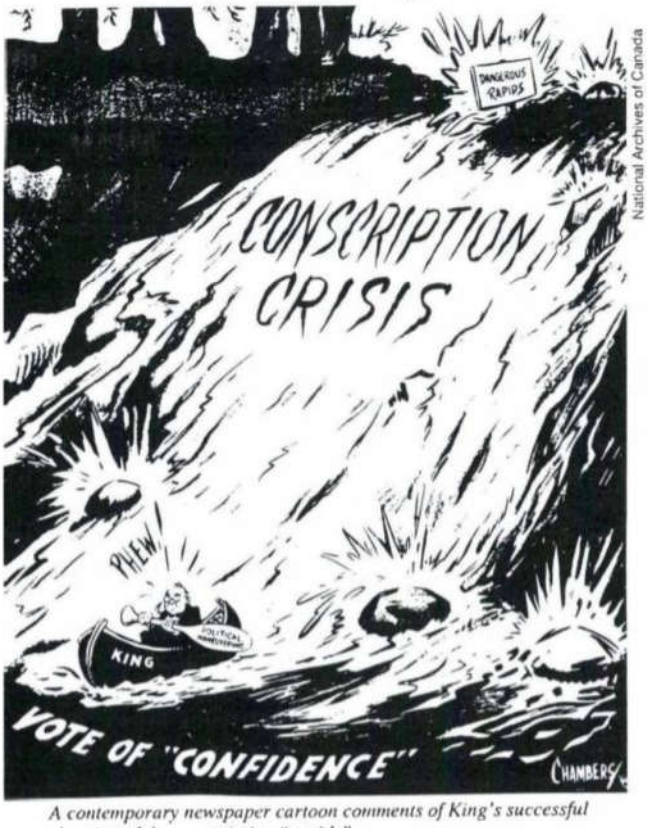
however, was that a fixed date be agreed upon to settle the seemingly endless debate.

When King sprang his announcement that McNaughton was prepared to take the Defence portfolio and continue the voluntary programme during one final appeal, Ralston rose and left the room. As we know, he went alone. He retained the admiration and affection of his colleagues but he no longer had their support. The "moderate" conscriptionists felt that Ralston had been badly served by his army advisors and that he had fatally compromised himself by staking his position on their aggressive and often inaccurate advice. Given the relationship between King and Ralston, the issue could only be resolved after the latter's departure.

That evening Macdonald confided to his diary that he thought "Ilsley would stay in the Cabinet and that Crerar took a certain glee in Ralston's sacking on the grounds that this would teach the General Staff a lesson". Macdonald had, in fact, talked with Crerar earlier that evening and recorded that Crerar "thinks that Ralston has been very badly treated, but on the other had, seems to believe that this will be somewhat of a lesson to the General Staff, for which Crerar has little use." The next day, Crerar wrote to Ralston to express his continuing friendship and regard, despite the fact that "over the past three years none of your colleagues has differed with you more that I have done". But there can be no doubting his position, surely shared by some of the others, when he continued, "The incident in last evening's Council meeting, in which you were relieved of your portfolio, shocked me greatly. This was occasioned, *not by your leaving the Administration,* but by the manner in which it was done". In Crerar's view, the Liberal Party owed much to Ralston and he deserved better from its leader.

The conviction of the conscriptionist ministers also should not be in doubt. They were not prepared to wreck the government at the close of the war after all they had been through, without giving McNaughton and the voluntary principle one last chance. Three weeks later, when it was clear that the new Defence Minister had failed, Crerar called a meeting in his office of Macdonald, Ilsley, Howe, Gibson and Mulock. They all agreed to resign forthwith if overseas conscription was not imposed that day. At Council that evening, King finally conceded and announced that up to 16,000 National Resources Mobilization Act men would be sent overseas.

To suggest that these men who had worked and quarrelled with King for four years of depression and four further years of war on an almost daily basis were somehow duped by the Prime Minister seems difficult to accept. They lacked neither the wit nor the courage to face King on the principle involved. But they also had to reckon the cost to the country of their actions. They were prepared, in the very short run, to afford McNaughton his opportunity; but they would not evade the decision they had not sought but were now obliged to confront. They did not fail Ralston; Ralston had failed his Cabinet colleagues. If the conscription issue were to be resolved and the government saved honourably, Ralston had to go. ◆



National Archives of Canada

A contemporary newspaper cartoon comments of King's successful shooting of the conscription "rapids".

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Military Two-Step

If, in reference to the very difficult question of service overseas, anyone can conceive of a policy which is better calculated to serve the national interest, than the one the government has formulated, and which is clearly and concisely expressed in the words: "Not necessarily conscription, but conscription if necessary," I shall be first to advocate its acceptance.
— W.L. Mackenzie King, 1942.

Kurt Meyer: Normandy to Dorchester

The Face of the Enemy

By James M. Whalen

On 28 December 1945 a Canadian military court in Aurich, Germany, found Major-General Kurt Meyer guilty of war crimes and sentenced him to be shot. Meyer, the youngest divisional commander in the German army at age 33, was convicted of the murder of 18 Canadian prisoners of war and of "denying quarter" to allied soldiers (*i.e.* ordering his men to take no prisoners). The killings occurred at his regimental headquarters at the Abbey Ardenne, near Caen, on the two days immediately following "D-Day" — the Normandy landings of 6 June 1944. At that time, he commanded the 25th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and despite these murders, was not executed. On 14 January 1946, Major-General Chris Vokes, Commander of the Canadian occupation force in Germany, commuted his sentence to life imprisonment on the grounds that "the severity of the sentence was not in my opinion in keeping with Canadian justice, having regard to the degree of responsibility." Although the decision outraged many Canadians, Vokes maintained that the trial did not prove Meyer gave a direct order for the killings.

Detained in England for about four months after sentencing, Meyer was then sent to Canada on board the SS *Aquitania*. Arriving in Halifax on 30 April 1946, he was taken to Dorchester Penitentiary, New Brunswick, where he remained for over five-and-a-half years. Meyer's committal there probably came about because the Warden, George T. Goad, formerly Provost Marshal of the Canadian Army, had experience with German prisoners of war.

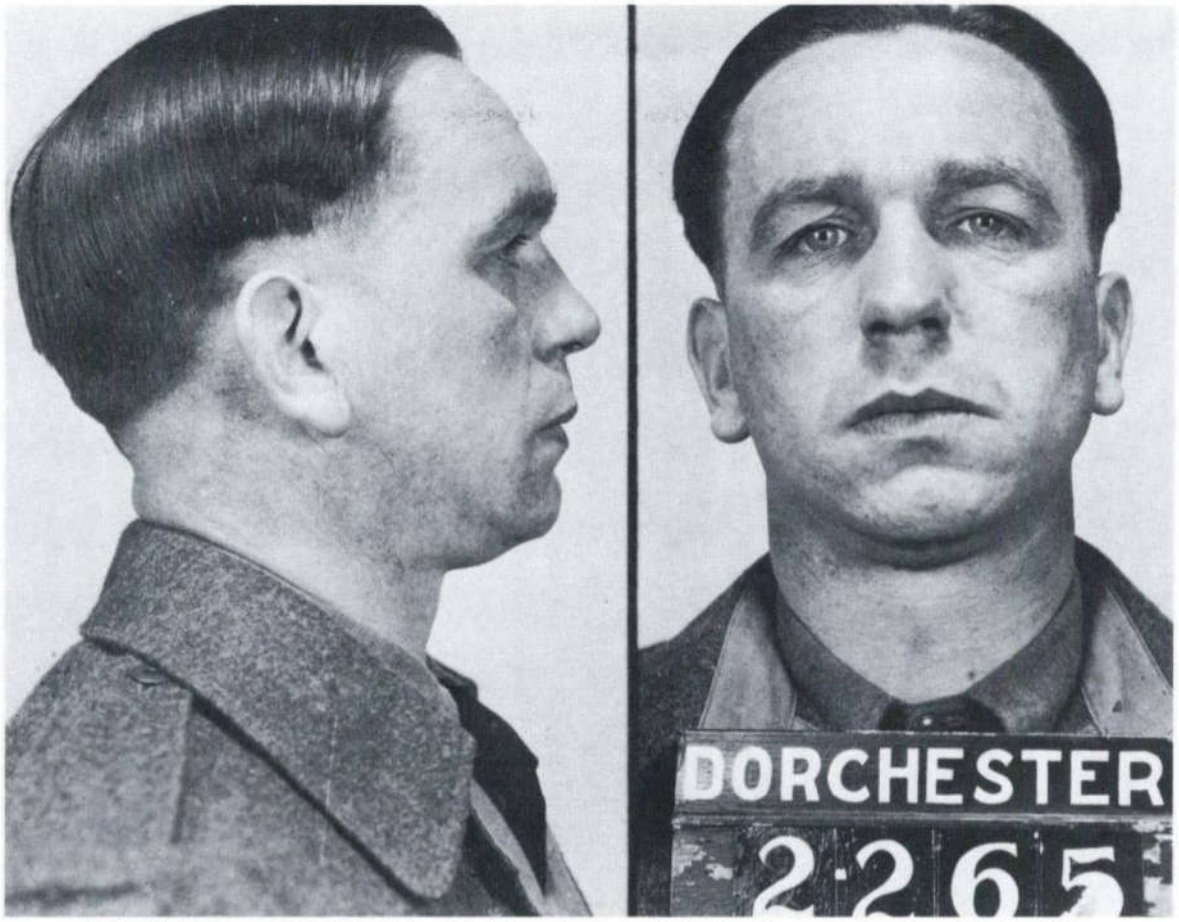
Kurt Meyer, the only Nazi war criminal imprisoned in Canada, was born on 23 December 1910, in Jerxheim, Province of Brunswick, Germany. After receiving his education, he, like his father, became a policeman. He joined the Brunswick State Police in 1929, where he underwent intensive military training. Despite multiple fractures incurred in an accident in 1933, which caused the shortening of his right leg, Meyer confounded nearly everyone when, just a year later, he earned a place with the SS Leibstandarte Adolph Hitler (Hitler's bodyguard regiment) in Berlin.

During the Second World War Meyer served with various combat units of the SS in nearly every German theatre of war, and was awarded both the Iron Cross and the Knight Cross for his exploits. In Russia for nearly three years, he was surrounded several times during the German retreat but managed to escape relatively unscathed. In October 1943, he became commander of the 25th SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment in the the 12th Panzer Division (Hitler Youth). On 13 June 1944, less than a week after the murder of the 18 Canadians at the Abbey Ardenne, Meyer took charge of that division following the death, in action, of its commander. He was divisional commander for less than three months when he was captured near Namur, Belgium, on 6 September. Subsequently, he was held under military detention in Europe until May 1946 when he entered Dorchester Penitentiary.

At Dorchester, the Classification Board assigned Meyer to the prison library although he was not fluent in English. His duties mainly consisted of cataloguing, as well as charging reading material in and out for distribution to convicts. In October 1951, the Classification Officer, R.G. Rowcliffe, remarked: "He did a good job. His interest never slackened and he gave much thought to improving the system as he found it and also worked hard in carrying out the necessary changes."

Meyer got along well with both staff and inmates but was kept apart because there were some inmates, especially ex-servicemen, who disliked him. He was accommodated in a segregation unit of the hospital, in the main prison, where a few inmates were kept for their own safety. Besides his library duties, he spent his time reading, writing and improving his English. He also attended chapel service regularly.

Meyer was usually well behaved in prison, but on at least two occasions, both reported in January 1949, he was reprimanded; first, for showing disrespect to an



"Mug shot" of inmate 2265, Brigadefuhrer Kurt Meyer, Dorchester Penitentiary, Dorchester, New Brunswick, May 1946.

officer; second, for receiving news from an inmate without permission. Further, in 1946, Meyer ate only one meal a day for about a month because he wanted to experience the shortages that many in post-war Germany faced daily.

While in Dorchester, Meyer obviously missed his wife and five children and kept a photograph of them at hand. Sometimes, he was so despondent over his separation from them that he contemplated suicide. In a letter to his wife on 29 September 1946 he wrote: "When despair or impotent hatred creep into my cell, all I have to do is gaze into your eyes and I feel peaceful again." He worried about his family's well-being because they suffered great deprivation due to the war and had to rely on welfare to survive. After the war, his wife, his son, and two daughters lived with Meyer's widowed mother in Offleben in the British zone, but two of his children lived elsewhere in Germany.

Meyer wrote often to Kate, his wife, and to Alma, his mother. From 1946 to 1948, he had no visitors and was allowed, therefore, to write more letters than the allotted number of two per month. Since it was against prison regulations to correspond with persons other than close relatives, he needed permission to write to anyone else.

Shortly after Meyer entered Dorchester in 1946, Fred Lichtenberg, a building contractor in nearby Moncton, tried to contact him. Lichtenberg, who was born in Germany, realized that Meyer's family could not visit Dorchester and wanted visiting privileges to Meyer instead. Such arrangements took time because prison regulations did not allow for visits except by one's family. In the meantime, Lichtenberg sent food and clothing to Meyer's family in Germany. Finally, in May 1949, the Department of Justice granted Lichtenberg, an "enemy alien" during the Second World War, permission to see Meyer. Lichtenberg's first visit was in company with Major James R. Millar, the Protestant army chaplain from Eastern Command, who had visited Meyer regularly since June 1948. It was Millar to whom Meyer recounted the military strategy of the 12th Panzer Division in the Caen-Falaise battle in which, according to him, he and his youthful grenadiers fought so courageously. He elaborated on his exploits

Canadian troops go ashore in Normandy, D-Day, 6 June 1944. Photo by Gilbert A. Milne.

in Normandy, in Russia, and his engagements in other campaigns, in an autobiography entitled *Panzergrendiere* published in Germany in 1957.

Once allowed in to see Meyer at Dorchester, Lichtenberg, always accompanied by Major Miller, became a regular visitor. After becoming acquainted with Meyer, Lichtenberg decided to assist him because of the apparent injustice of his sentence and his imprisonment so far from Germany.

In 1946 Meyer requested a lawyer to review his case. As a career soldier, it was degrading for him to be in a civilian prison with "criminals, murderers, and perverts." He wanted a transfer to a military prison in Germany to be near his family whom he had not seen since 1945. But, he got nowhere until a citizens' group, headed by Lichtenberg, demanded that Meyer's case be re-examined. At their urging, Henry P. MacKeen and Rolland A. Ritchie, both Halifax lawyers, agreed to handle Meyer's case. Subsequently, they sent a petition to the Department of Justice, in December 1950, asking for Meyer's release. They claimed that his trial was based, in part, on improper evidence and hearsay. In February 1951, the Cabinet considered the petition but decided not to grant Meyer clemency, "having regard to the temper of public opinion generally." Seven months later, it again decided against Meyer's release but agreed to transfer him to Werl, a service prison for Nazi war criminals in the British zone of Germany, "as a change in the relationship between the occupying powers and West Germany was imminent."

Meyer, by this time, was the only Nazi war criminal held in custody outside Germany. On 18 October 1951, the transfer took place. Although Werl was run under German regulations, and administered by the British, Canada controlled Meyer's sentence. So it created quite a furore when, on 26 November 1951, Douglas How, of Canadian Press, interviewed Meyer at his home in Offleben, Germany. Without the knowledge of the Government of Canada, the prison had granted Meyer ten days' compassionate leave to visit his family. Rumours circulated that Meyer might soon be freed, although veterans' organizations, especially the Royal Canadian Legion, were strongly opposed.

Eventually, pressure came from Germany for the release of Kurt Meyer, and Johann Neitz, also serving a life sentence in Werl for war crimes against Canada. Following the visit of German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to Werl, on 28 June 1953, the Bonn government recommended that their sentences be commuted. When Canada refused, the German Foreign Minister argued, to no avail, that Meyer be temporarily freed, in order to undergo hydrotherapy for chronic arthritis. Coincidently, British officials in Germany, who then had responsibility for those convicted of war crimes against Canada, as well as against their own country, "expressed their embarrassment at the continued detention," of Meyer. By that time, Britain had pardoned a large number of Nazi war criminals.

National Archives of Canada

On trial for war crimes against Canada, Kurt Meyer stands between an escort of two Canadian officers, Major Arthur Russell (left) and Captain Elton McPhail, Aurich, Germany, 10 December 1945.

Finally, a Mixed Clemency Board, composed of representatives from the United Kingdom and Germany, recommended a reduction of the sentences of both Meyer and Neitz. Although not bound by the decision, on 15 January 1954 the Government of Canada commuted their terms to 14 years. With good behaviour and pre-trial custody taken into account, Meyer got out on 7 September 1954, exactly ten years after his capture in Belgium. Because of the secrecy surrounding his release, he was met only by his wife, Kate; Fred Litchenberg, the German-born Canadian who was his friend and supporter; and a few other friends. Later, in Niederkrutchten, where his family then lived, several veterans of the Waffen-SS and other well-wishers gave him a hero's welcome.

Free at last, Meyer, became a salesman for Andreas Brewery in Hagen. Ironically, the brewery's customers included some messes of the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade stationed in West Germany. Meyer supplied beer to the Canadians and, on occasion, drank in the mess of at least one of the units. But this embarrassing situation was soon stopped, although Meyer still sold beer to the mess.

Popularly known as "Panzer Meyer," he remained a confirmed Nazi throughout his life. A 1945 Intelligence Report described him as follows:

> Kurt Meyer is the personification of National Socialism. His mind paralysed with long propaganda, is quite unable to consider any other point of view. His whole outlook is dominated by the peril of Russia and the Communist threat to Germany, which reason he gives for his whole-hearted adherence to Hitler and his teachings.

Given this assessment, it is not surprising that in the 1950s Meyer became a spokesman for a German veterans' organization representing the Waffen-SS. Meyer staunchly defended the actions of the Waffen-SS, especially the combat units which fought at the front. As former soldiers, he believed that those who were willing and able should be allowed into the regular army. In addition, he wanted to obtain pensions and other benefits for Waffen-SS veterans and their families. But, the Bonn government was unsympathetic with the plight of the SS because of its association with S.S. chief Heinrich Himmler and, consequently, its involvement in unspeakable atrocities in policing Nazi occupied territories and performing duties at concentration camps.

At any rate, there was little chance that Meyer, himself, could have resumed a military career after serving his prison sentence. He limped because of his pre-war accident and had to wear an orthopaedic shoe. In addition, he not only suffered from chronic arthritis but had sustained three gunshot wounds to his body and a blow to his head during the war.

After his release from Werl in 1954, Meyer had only seven years of freedom. In 1961, he suffered a series of strokes and finally, on 23 December, the date of his 51st birthday, he died of heart failure in Hagen. Few tears were shed in Canada over his death because his conviction for the murder of unarmed Canadian soldiers in Normandy had not been forgotten. Moreover, as Opposition Leader George Drew stated in Parliament, late in 1951: "He had become a symbol in the minds of Canadians who had suffered from Nazi brutality." ◆

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MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS TO THE RESCUE

Action on the Atlantic

By Robert C. Fisher

When first contemplating the acquisition of Motor Torpedo Boats, Canadian naval authorities envisaged a wide range of roles for these fast attack craft — almost everything but convoy escort. Thus it is surprising that one of the first, and least known, Canadian MTB actions occurred with a German U-boat. The Canadian-manned MTB-332, although not equipped for anti-submarine warfare, scored a dramatic success against U-123 off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina during April 1942.

In July 1940, after months of investigation, the RCN awarded a contract to the Canadian subsidiary of the British Power Boat Company to build 12 70-foot MTBs in Montreal. Plans called for each MTB to have two eighteen-inch torpedo tubes, two twin .50 calibre machine guns, and a top speed of 38 knots. The prototype, dubbed "CMTB-1", was shipped from Britain to Montreal in July 1940 and later served at Halifax as a training vessel. Before the remaining boats were completed, however, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, requested the flotilla's services (with or without crews) in the Mediterranean theatre. The RCN, not having a definite role for the MTBs, acceded to his request. As a result the British Admiralty assumed the MTB contracts. Because of the winter freeze-up at Montreal, Canadian Power Boat Company transferred the MTBs to Connecticut boat yards in late 1941 for completion.

Two of the first Canadian MTBs completed were commissioned in the Royal Navy as MTB-332 and MTB-335. Manned by Canadian steaming parties, the two boats set out from Staten Island, New York, in March 1942 under the command of Lieutenant Commander Robert M. Powell, Royal Canadian Navy Veterans' Reserve, for Port-of- Spain, Trinidad, where the British would take possession. When the MTBs arrived at Norfolk, Virginia, the U.S. Navy outfitted them each with six depth charges to prepare them for their passage through the perilous waters off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. During the preceding months U-boats had slaughtered merchant shipping in this area and the U.S. Atlantic fleet, stripped of warships for the Pacific war, had been powerless to stop the carnage. During March 1942 alone Axis submarines sank 28 merchant vessels on the eastern seaboard.

American authorities routed the two MTBs "through the known areas of greatest enemy submarine activity" in the hope of surprising a U-boat on the surface. On the afternoon of 1 April they departed Norfolk for Charleston, South Carolina, cruising at 27 knots until darkness fell. The bright moonlit night offered good opportunities for hunting, so when the MTBs approached Cape Hatteras, Powell ordered them to darken ship and slowed to 16 knots to reduce engine noise. At 0130/2 lookouts on the bridge of MTB-332 glimpsed flashes of gunfire on the horizon. Powell warned MTB-335 and increased to 32 knots to investigate. MTB-335 missed his signal, however, and was quickly left behind as her partner accelerated into the night. When Powell arrived at the scene of the fireworks sixteen miles distant he saw a large tanker being shelled by an invisible enemy.

The unseen attacker was U-123, a large type IXB submarine, commanded by *Kapitänleutnant* Reinhard Hardegen, one of the most successful German U-boat aces. During his first North American patrol he had destroyed nine merchant ships of 53,000 tons; he had torpedoed four of these ships off Cape Hatteras in a single night. Now on his second American patrol, he had returned to his favourite hunting ground. Shortly after midnight on 2 April he sighted the silhouette of the American-flag tanker *Liebre* and closed to attack. His first torpedo went astray because of an incorrect estimate of the tanker's course and speed. Frustrated, Hardegen surfaced and opened fire with U-123's 105mm calibre deck gun from 2,700 yards. One of his first shots struck the bridge and he continued to shell *Liebre* for another forty minutes. Fifteen shells battered the stricken tanker. According to Hardegen's log, the "target was hit hard" and "burning with bright flames". A hit in the engine room killed two men and forced the crew to stop the engines. Two lifeboats took to the water with twenty-five men.

The blazing tanker lit the night sky. Hardegen had

decided to submerge to fire a *coup de grâce* when he glimpsed the bright bow wave of the rapidly approaching MTB. Powell's sudden appearance forced the U-boat to crash dive to escape attack. Even though U-123 outgunned the MTB, Hardegen could not risk damage so far from home. Still hoping to finish off the tanker, he raised the periscope to fire a torpedo. Through the scope, he incorrectly identified the MTB as a 165-foot Coast Guard cutter. From the bridge of MTB-332, Powell sighted the periscope 50 yards on the starboard beam and manoeuvred to drop a string of depth charges in the path of the U-boat, but because of poor communications only one charge was released. Powell estimated that it exploded 30 yards from the submarine — too far for lethal results.

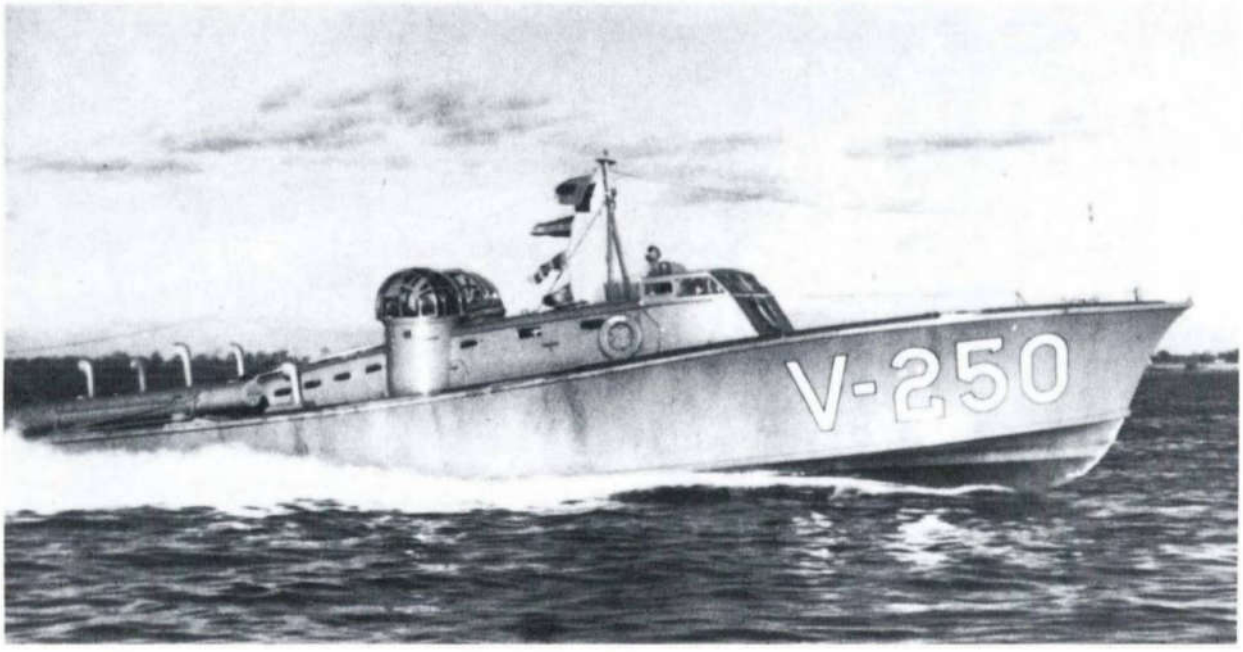
Below the surface in 100 feet of water, U-123 felt the impact of the poorly-aimed depth charge but did not sustain serious damage. Hardegen retracted his periscope: in his preoccupation with the MTB he had forgotten to torpedo *Liebre*. MTB-332 ran over the position again but without sonar equipment could not detect U-123, nor did Powell wish to waste depth charges by dropping them randomly. Correctly guessing that the MTB did not have sonar, but fearing the arrival of larger warships, Hardegen made his escape below the surface, hoping he had caused enough damage to sink the tanker. SS *Liebre* stayed afloat, however, and Powell sent two sailors on board to attempt to extinguish the fire. When he learned that the ship had been abandoned, he recovered his men and notified American authorities at Morehead City, North Carolina.

Courtesy R.M. Powell

The U.S. Coast Guard and Navy rescued the tanker's crew and the tug *Resolute* towed her to Morehead City. After basic repairs *Liebre* was rebuilt at Baltimore and re-entered service in July 1942. Nine of the tanker's crew had been killed during the action. U-123 had escaped unscathed to the south. The MTBs continued on their voyage to Trinidad and Naval Service Headquarters subsequently commended Lieutenant Commander Robert Powell, RCNVR, for his part in saving the stricken SS *Liebre*. ◆

Robert C. Fisher is an historian with the Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa.

Above: Lieutenant-Commander Robert M. Powell, RCNVR. Below: MTB V-250 on a test run in the St. Lawrence River, 1941. Powell commanded a similar vessel in the action off Cape Hatteras.



Department of National Defence

D-Day Plus Fifty Years

These poems belong to a long-ago, but still very-present, part of my life — to the years of the Second World War and the time spent as a chaplain in the Canadian Army in Great Britain and Northwest Europe. Only the first of the poems was written in Britain, at an army camp in the south of England. Of the others, some were composed during the campaign in Northwest Europe, the remainder in periods of reflection in Holland following VE-Day (8 May 1945).

At the time they were written, I had the thought that there might be enough of them to form a small book; but, on my return to Canada, other interests intervened — the task of getting re-established in my profession, etcetera — and the mood for writing more war poems passed. So the book I had in mind never materialized.

When I did get back to writing poetry, my interests had returned to the prairie environment which I know as home; and, when I finally had manuscripts ready for book publication, the handful of poems I had written during the war never seemed to belong. As the years passed and more books of prairie-based poems appeared, the small sheaf of war poems lay neglected, to the point where I actually forgot I had written them.

Then, a few years ago, when my wife and I decided to sell our house and move into an apartment, they were re-discovered. While going through a filing cabinet, trying to decide what to keep or discard, I came upon an unmarked folder which I was on the verge of throwing out. Before doing so, however, I decided to have a quick peek at its contents — and there were the war poems I had composed so many years before.

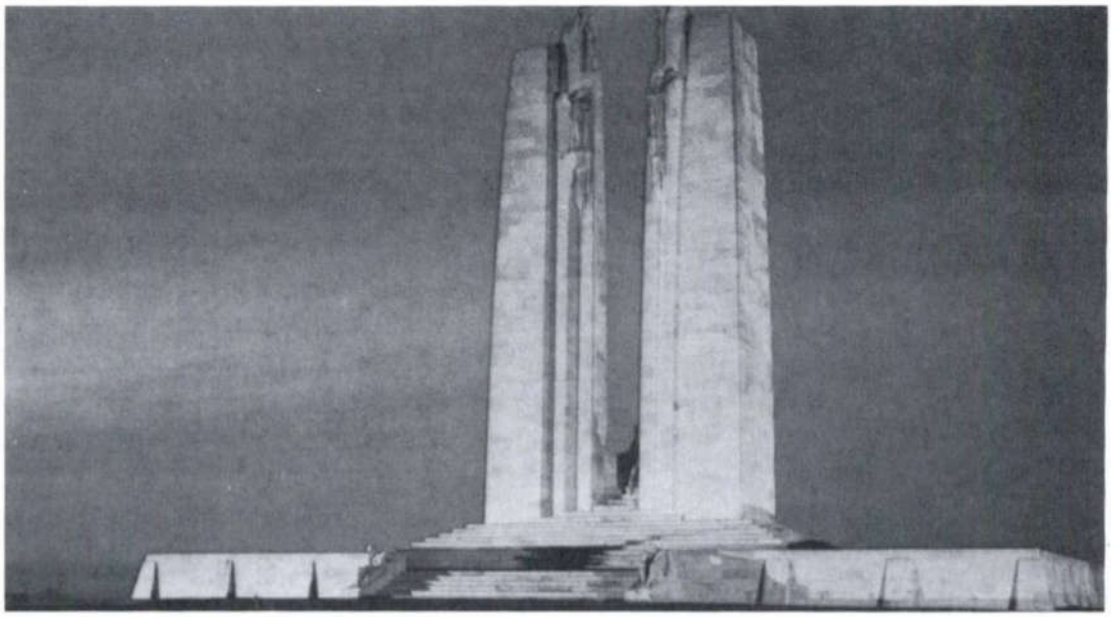
As I read them I felt they had merit, an opinion which was endorsed by my wife. I showed them to a few army friends and to a Professor of English at the University of Manitoba. They, too felt they had merit. The trouble was I personally believed that the time for publication had passed. They should have been offered for publication, either in chapbook form or as a contribution to some periodical, as soon after war's end as possible. I decided that now the best I could do with them was to have a few copies made for my children and grandchildren. And there the matter rested.

Then, a year or so ago, I felt there might still be an opportunity for publication. The year 1994 would mark the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day. Might not these poems be used to help mark that occasion? I thought it was at least a possibility.

As I re-read the poems, I realized that they represented only a small part of my reactions to my wartime experiences. They said nothing about camaraderie among the troops, for example; nothing of friendships forged in conflict that were to endure through the years; nothing of regimental or unit pride or the many little human foibles and frailties that endeared us to one another; little of the tremendous acts of heroism performed by ordinary men, all of whom were citizens before they were soldiers; nothing of the lusts, as well as the heroisms, that are the accompaniment of war. And much, much more — aspects of the war experience that these poems do not touch on at all.

Yet I felt they had captured at least something of what war had meant to some of us, something that might speak to others who had shared a common experience, and might even speak to those who have come after us and know the wartime experience only through hearsay, or the inadequacies of historians, or the various media interpretations and misinterpretations which have come to us over the years. Whatever their merit, these verses have the authenticity of lines written by one who, even though a non-combatant, and not himself a D-Day soldier, was present for some of the action in Northwest Europe and was exposed to many of the same dangers and temptations as the troops with whom he served.

As I re-read the poems, too, I became increasingly aware that they were the most personal poems I had ever written — and, using traditional forms, very much the poems of a young man of that era. I could trace in them innocence being forced to come to grips with the harsh facts of experience, and the frustrations of idealism in the face of some all-too-grim realities. But I



The Poetry of War Rediscovered

By Tom Saunders

could also see idealism surviving the worst that war had to offer. *That* is there, in the last, as well as the first, of these poems, and is nowhere more explicit than in the penultimate poem, *Imago Dei.*

Not long after VE-Day, when I had been seconded from my regiment to act as Staff Chaplain at Army Troops Headquarters, I had occasion, in the course of my duties, to visit a medical unit in the Reichwald. In doing so I took the opportunity to drive through the German towns of Cleve, Calcar and Emmerich, all of which had been reduced to rubble. Yet people existed in the rubble. I could see them scrambling out of it — men, women and children — like rats out of their holes. I remember thinking that, physically, these towns might be rebuilt, but how could anyone hope to rebuild the broken, seemingly sub-human, lives? Yet, in course of time, these people did rebuild their lives as well as their towns. The human spirit ultimately triumphed over the worst that war could bring against it. To me, that remains a parable on the resiliency of the spirit of man.

I find *that* a very strong element in most of these poems. And I find something else. I find how much Canada had come to mean to me in the days when I was far from it. The references to that part of Canada which I have long known as home keep recurring in these verses, to the point where Canada becomes not only a symbol of home but of peace. Stated or implicit in virtually all of these verses is a realization of the transiency of war and the permanence of something that will outlast all wars. What that something is finds expression, for me, most fully in Canada itself.

So, half-a-century after these poems were written, they finally see the light of day. On this fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, I dedicate them to all — both living and dead — who served and shared in that memorable experience.

Interlude

The air is still tonight; the sky is clear;
the ominous, sodden blanket of the clouds
is rolled away; the stars drift low above
the draggled fields, bringing the prairie to
the English Downs, flooding the world with light,
thrilling the soul with strange, unquiet peace,
and pushing back the harsh frontiers of war
toward the borders of the mind. The long,
imposing hum of planes is past; and now
the air is drenched in a great weight of silence.
The eyes and heart look up and seek the sky...

The same stars mark the heavens I have known
above the wheatfields and the whitened winter
plains of home: Cassiopeia, Leo
and the Bear, the trembling Pleiades, and gaunt
Orion and the faithful Dogs. Only
the magic motion and the cold ephemeral
colours of the sweeping Northern Lights
cast no elusive spell. All else is as
the heart remembers it: the same sky I
have loved, unveiled for this brief interlude
of peace between the awful acts and aching
tragedy of war.

But from the earth,
in the pervading stillness, speaks a harsh,
daemonic voice of life, flouting the stars
as curses flout the sanctity of God,
a voice of things seen rather than things heard:
the flat, squat shapes of buildings housing troops,
the shadowed, rutted tracks of tanks and guns,
and all the baleful symbols of man's vile
subservience to Mars.

The same sky but
another earth is here, a part of life
that is not England or the Western Plains,
but something evil, sinister as death:
the dark malignant forces of the world
reaching with grasping hands to pluck the stars.

One Day This, Too, Will Be a Memory

One day this, too, will be a memory,
this demi-life of servitude to Mars,
this madness, this world-fevered plague, that scars
the tissues of the soul — this, too, will be
a prospect to look back upon and see
in quiet retrospect; and other wars,
a thousand years gone by, will dim the stars
no less than this. Life's basic dignity,
lost in the holocaust of hate and strife,
will turn again, assert itself, and tower,
to crown the world with peace. The turbid sea
of life, now at the ebb, with stormings rife,
will surge again to shore in quiet power;
and all this, too, will be a memory.

Portents

Presaging Duncan's murder there were weird,
unnatural events in heaven and earth;
and Birnam Wood, Macduff's untimely birth,
were omens to Macbeth. Great men have feared
great things in nature and themselves, and steered
their course against relentless fate; and, dearth
of hope, have heard the very gods make mirth
at their expense. Portents of death have leered
from heaven's face and from earth's bosom flamed.
But now there are no portents in the sky;
for death itself pours down in mortal flood.
There are no omens telling who will die,
or who will cry in anguish with the maimed,
or what life will be stirring, quick with blood.

The Dead

They cannot go again, what way they came,
to that young, shining world they knew; and all
the dread adventure of their death goes with
them where they go; and none can tell their tale.

In days when men shall write the story of
this war, how will they know the things the dead
alone can speak? How will they say what they
have known and felt? How see their world?

They, who
live history, are never truly part
of the historian's chronicle. The cold,
objective statement, leech-like, sucks the blood
from life, and makes a war a diagrammed
reality that is not war, nor life,
nor any part of all the world they knew.

There is a tale the dead alone can tell,
a world of which the dead alone can speak;
and they are silent, and their tale untold.

On an Avenue of Beech Trees

The tortured landscape seemed to breathe in pain,
like some great giant stricken in his pride.
Great, gaping wound-holes torn in its side,
a casualty of battle with the men,
it lay in dismal plight; while death, like rain,
poured down in battle-carnage, and the tide
of war rolled on. Grim trees, uprooted, died
in silent anguish with the bleeding slain.

Then the vast din of war edged into silence.
The little jeep crept through the jagged field,
beyond the battle's orbit, into peace:
an avenue of beech trees stood revealed
against the skyline, mocking all the violence
of men, and battle's bold indecencies.

Lament

Norman is gone and Paul is gone,
and Damon whom I loved;
and I am left here all alone —
alone, and deeply moved.

O, could I love my friends less well,
I would not know this pain,
or feel my aching heart rebel
for those I love, in vain!

At Peace

So short a time ago he knew no peace:
only the harsh discord of battle in
his soul cried out, piercing his nerves and flesh
and scorching through his brain; and horrid fear
and strident hate froze his young features in
a mask of age.

Then time recoiled upon
itself, and he was young again; death tore
from him a single, rending cry, and life
fled forth like some dread daemon exorcised
by Christ.

In quietness more perfect than
the quietness of sleep, he lay at peace.

The Soldier

He saw his world grow smaller, closing in
on him as water closes in on some
bare rock with the incoming tide; and fear
laid hold on him, sweeping like waves across
the reaches of his heart.

In all the fateful
years of war he knew no fear: his world
was large and he a giant striding through
its wastes. He was a soldier's soldier — smart,
immaculate in dress and drill; and in
the fire of combat like a god, unmoved,
unscathed, amid the flames: one of the heroes
who would save the world.

And now this christ
was coming to his cross. War, that had freed
him from the little world that once had fenced
him in and crushed his soul with the dead weight
of custom and the mores of his race,
had brought new stature to himself and to
his world. In all that hell of fear for other
men he knew no fear, in the dread heat
of battle knew no dread.

But now he faced
Gethsemane and all the torture and
anticipation of death within
the soul; and all the gods of war whom he
had served availed him not.

Unmanned by peace,
he crawled back to his little world to count
the empty days and die before his time.

Vimy Ridge — Spring 1945*

Across the ridge of Vimy
and down the quiet steep
wanders the silent shepherd
tending the silent sheep.

The little fields slope gently
to meet the greening plain
Where soft the wind caresses
the young, unheaded grain.

The head-stones and the trenches
are hid behind the trees,
where mating birds shrill sweetly
their native melodies.

And, like a benediction
in smooth and sculptured stone,
the monument on Vimy
stands peaceful and alone.

And ruined Lens lies hidden;
and there is naught to say,
if war and all its terrors
had ever come that way.

*In the early Spring of 1945, in a period of rest before the last push that brought to an end hostilities in Europe, three friends and I decided to pay a visit to the Canadian War Memorial at Vimy Ridge. We drove through the rubble of Lens, partially destroyed for the second time in two wars, past the Vimy Memorial and up the ridge. There, before we could see the cemeteries and trenches, we came upon a shepherd with his flock of sheep.

Imago Dei

These men were infantry. They fought
the hard way — yard by yard, and mile
by bloody mile. Who would have thought
that they'd have come out with a smile,
knowing the hell they'd left behind
and carried with them in their heart?

Six weeks of action, underlined
by fear and death, had been their part:
foot-slogging soldiers in a grim
advance — forward a mile, dig in,
beat off attack; hold fast the slim
thin-edge of gain; again begin:
over and over, till the mind
was numb. Nerves tensed to steel, and steeled
their hearts, they moved, in bodies' blind
automaton advance, to shield,
in chaos, chaos from the world.

Now their long stint was ended. Now
they plodded back. They who had hurled
themselves against destruction's brow
and triumphed, plodded back. They came,
leaving their dead behind them where
they lay. Gone from their eyes the flame
of battle-passion, past all care
and feeling, slow they moved. Along
the ditch in single file they moved,
Bren-gun on shoulder, with no tongue
to voice their weariness; reproved
all speech in their exhausted eyes.
Bren-gun on shoulder — one foot up,
then down — beyond all agonies,
they moved; drained to the dregs the cup
of human suffering, and drained
all manhood from them to the lees.

This was the price, past pain, that gained
the victory. They paid the fees
of war, not with their blood alone,
but with the spirit's sacrifice
that made them men. This, war had done
to them: the human edifice
had crumbled to the ground in days
and nights when time was but caprice,
and all that's bestial found ways
to soil the beautiful and good.

So now they plodded back, no more
the men they were, no more than crude,
bleak shells of what they were, before
their triumph brought catastrophe.

Then someone cursed; and someone smiled;
and someone started suddenly
to sing; and soon there was a wild
outburst of singing. Feet that dragged
picked up the step, shoulders went back,
heads high, and every arm that lagged
limp by the side swung free. The black,
dull mood has passed, and they were men
again. The human spirit soared
into their song down the long line
of marchers; in their eyes, though blurred,
enthroned, *Imago Dei* shone.

The Heart's Cry for Home

The things that count are always personal;
I cannot see the world except through eyes
grown used to the familiar things I've loved;
and all the bitter transiency of war
cannot erase what the proud years have writ,
but scrawls a pale palimpsest on my heart
but dimly traced and scarce discernible
to my own mind. For war, which has the world
in thrall, to me is personal as life
and death; and all the things I've loved, like leaves
blown by the wind, storm over me till all
the present's shrouded in the past; and fear,
and the black thunder of the guns, and blood,
and death, and the unspoken dreams for which
men fight, fade in a vision of the land
I love, at dawn and sunset, and the peace
of home; and little feet go pounding down
the torn arterial highways of my heart.

Following the war, Manitoba poet Tom Saunders was, for ten years, attached as Chaplain to the Militia Battalion of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles. He is a member of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Association, permanent Chaplain of the Little Black Devils Officers' Association, and, at the age of 85, continues as an active member of the Regimental Advisory Board. He has published several collections of poems.

OPERATION HABBAKUK

'Professor' Pyke's Secret Weapon

It was all so devilishly simple —
Huge ships made of ice would sink Hitler

By F.J. McEvoy

"Necessity is the mother of invention". Never is this more true than in wartime, as each side seeks new weapons that will turn the tide or counter some advantage held by the enemy. In such desperate times unusual ideas are given serious attention. For much of 1943 Canada's National Research Council and its head, Dean C.J. Mackenzie, were preoccupied with the strangest idea of all — the plan of eccentric Englishman Geoffrey Pyke to construct immense warships out of ice.

A combination of circumstances provided a climate in which such a seemingly ridiculous idea gained the amount of attention it ultimately did. One factor was the desperate shortage of aircraft carriers facing the Allies in 1942, ships required to confront the German U-boat menace and to participate in the eventual invasion of Europe. If "bergships", as Pyke called them, could be built cheaply and quickly, they would be of immense strategic value.

High level support was required if Pyke's scheme was to be given resources adequate to develop it. Here he was fortunate in the character of his boss, Lord Louis Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations. It was the role of Combined Ops to develop new weapons and Mountbatten brought to the job, in the words of biographer Richard Hough, an "ingenious, curious, technical, inventive and ever-open mind... Nothing was beyond consideration; it was a characteristic that he shared with Churchill, and a factor in Churchill's decision to give him this job." Pyke's visionary idea won their enthusiastic support, despite the opposition of more prosaic scientific and military minds who dismissed it as nonsense.

Who was Geoffrey Pyke? Little remembered today, he was hailed by the *London Times* at his death in 1948 as "one of the most original if unrecognized figures of the present century." To Mountbatten he was the "most unusual and provocative man I have ever met." Always oblivious to his personal appearance, he looked, with his glasses, goatee and habitual sloppy dress, like the eccentric genius he was — a perfect example of Hollywood typecasting.

Born in London in 1894, his life was distinctive from childhood. When his father died his mother informed him that he was now the head of the household. He was five years old at the time. Though he had a natural bent for science he read law at Cambridge but never completed his degree. His unique approach to life became evident during the First World War. He entered Germany in the guise of an American salesman, intending to send dispatches to a British newspaper. He was quickly captured and imprisoned in a camp, from which he later escaped — after minutely studying the habits of his guards — making his way to Holland.

In the interwar period he worked for a magazine, made and lost a fortune on the commodities market, set up an experimental school for children based on the latest psychological and educational theories, and tried to organize aid for the Loyalists opposing Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Then in the summer of 1939 he sent a team into Germany to conduct a clandestine public opinion poll which he believed would show that the German people did not want war. The results would then be sent to Hitler. This imaginative

National Archives of Canada

Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King makes the most of a photo opportunity at the Quebec Conference, 1943. President Franklin Roosevelt listens to the PM while Winston Churchill puffs at his cigar. American General H.H. Arnold (back row, far left) demonstrated the strength of "pycrete" during secret sessions, getting a jarring in the process.

scheme had to be aborted in late August when war became imminent.

Following the outbreak of war Pyke tried to interest various government departments in his ideas, including the conduct of further secret polling, to no avail. He did, though, win the support of Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India, who became something of a patron. His moment came in March 1942 with Mountbatten's appointment as head of Combined Ops, which quickly became a haven for unusual and original thinkers. He was recommended to Mountbatten by Amery and was taken on staff.

At the end of September Pyke sent Mountbatten a description of a project to which he gave the code name "Habbakuk". This was a slight misspelling of the Biblical book of that name — Habakkuk — one verse of which reads: "For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." Succinctness was not one of Pyke's virtues. The document he presented the busy Mountbatten was 232 pages in length. More than a mere technical outline of his plan, it was a poetic description of the wonders his "bergships" would accomplish.

The construction of these ships was based on Pyke's experiments with ice, during which he found that the addition of other materials, such as particles of wood, increased the strength of ice immensely. By adding wood pulp to water and freezing it he created a substance, named pykrete, which had amazing properties. Not only was it very strong, the wood pulp acted as an insulator that inhibited melting. Only a small amount of energy was thus required to keep it frozen.

Based on this, Pyke posited huge aircraft carriers built entirely of pykrete, unsinkable and virtually invulnerable to attack. Inside their hollow hulls would go freezing plants to maintain them, as well as living quarters and work space. Pyke also foresaw vast freighters whose cargo would be unloaded by carving a hole in the side and sliding it out onto ice barges. The hole could then be frozen shut again. When no longer required, the ships could simply be left to melt gradually away.

Fleets of bergships would assault enemy ports, launching waves of bombers against them. Troops would follow in ice landing craft shaped like huge Italian gondolas. Pyke then proceeded to outline detailed plans for using his bergships to invade Italy, Japan and Germany. His memorandum reads like science fiction, yet the basic idea was taken seriously by Mountbatten and then by Churchill.

The latter, indeed, became an enthusiastic advocate

Minister of Munitions C.D. Howe inspects conventional war materials at an anti-tank bomb factory in Hamilton, Ontario. Mr. Howe, centre, is accompanied by Revenue Minister Colin Gibson, left, and an official. Women played a key role in defence production during the war.

of the project. In December 1942 he sent a memo to the Chiefs of Staff demanding urgent action. Though modestly admitting that he wasn't familiar with the physical properties of ice, he stressed that the advantages of Pyke's bergships "are so dazzling that they do not at the moment need to be discussed. There would be no difficulty in finding a place to put such a 'stepping stone' in any of the plans of war now under consideration."

The obvious place to build ice ships was in Canada, and the obvious body to undertake the necessary preliminary studies was the National Research Council, then under the direction of Chalmers Jack Mackenzie, acting head in the absence overseas of General Andrew McNaughton, the soldier-scientist commanding the Canadian army in England. One of Canada's most distinguished men of science, Mackenzie was privy to the top scientific secrets of the war, including the atomic bomb project. It is clear from his diary for the first half of 1943 that he devoted a major amount of his time to Habbakuk during a period when the atomic bomb was also a major responsibility.

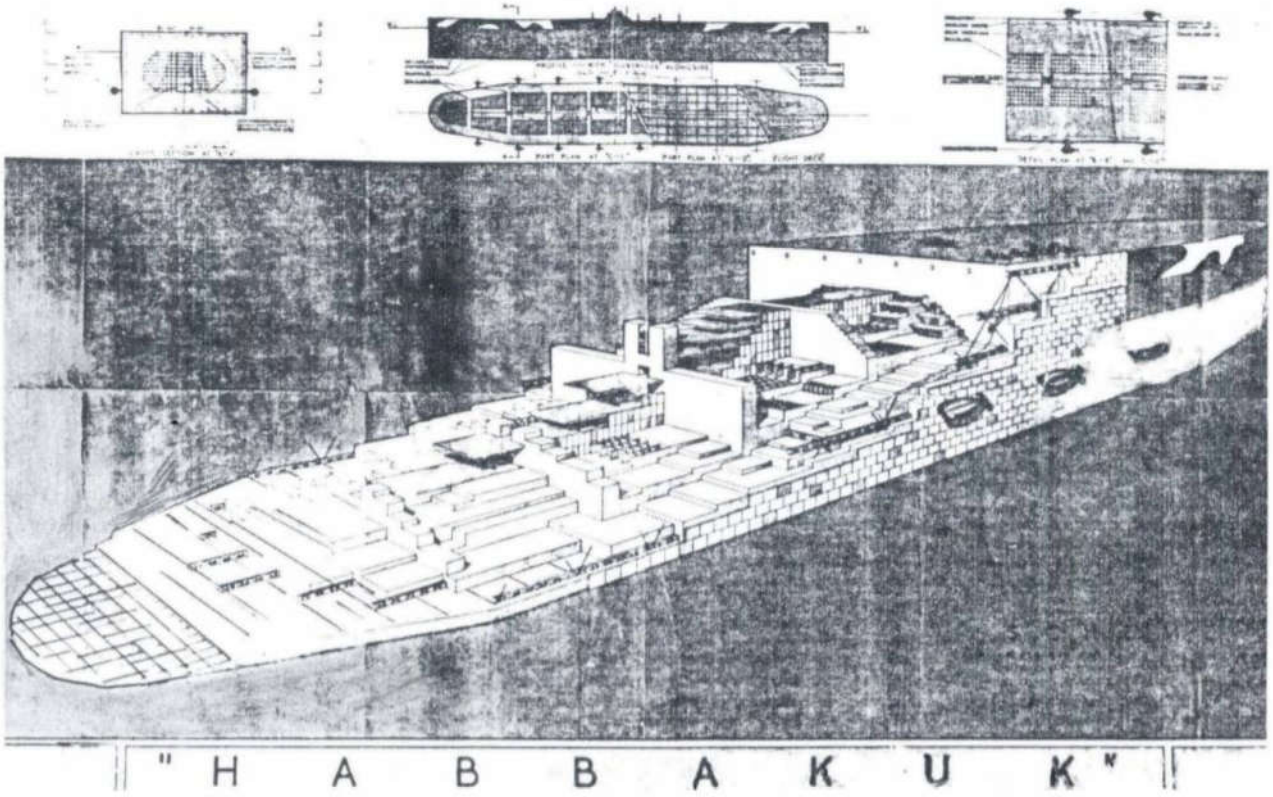
On 8 January 1943 Mackenzie was informed by his liaison officer in London that the Canadian government would shortly be requested to do research on Habbakuk. "All facts regarding properties of ice on large scale," he telegrammed, "resistance to explosives, types of insulating materials, most economical size of ice blocks etc. are desired this winter so that construction may be started next November if results prove satisfactory." Three days later Mountbatten asked High Commissioner Vincent Massey to place the matter before his government on an urgent basis. This was done and the Canadian authorities naturally agreed to a British request with such high level support.

Mackenzie recorded his initial scathing reaction in his diary on 14 January:

> This is another of those mad, wild schemes that we come in contact with frequently and while one cannot say that it is not practicable I am quite sure that if it were suggested in normal circles here we would not have the ghost of a chance of getting it before even a minor official, but it can start with a couple of crazy men in England and get Churchill's attention and the attention of the highest people in Canada and even of the P.M. here. At any rate we will go on on some work on the project but what I object to in all of this scheme of things is ... that apparently only the wildest kind of scheme can get before P.M.

Despite his feelings Mackenzie had no choice but to co-operate, and he did so energetically. On the 26th he saw Finance Minister J.L. Ilsley, obtaining an immediate grant of $150,000 and agreement to spend a lot of money quickly without going through normal procedures. The next day he saw C.D. Howe, a key figure as Minister of Munitions and Supply, who proved "very interested" in the project and agreed to give it the highest priority. He spent the last few days of the month out West where he arranged for two major projects to be started at Banff and Jasper as well as a research program at three Western universities. "At least," he felt, "we would have a large number of intelligent and experienced people working on the project which should give results."

With winter well advanced time was of the essence,



Plans for the Habbakuk ships got as far as the drawing board and beyond before the project was shelved.

as he informed his liaison man, Laidlaw, in London, reporting that he had secured full support from the armed services, government departments and private companies. Upon his return to Ottawa he found that plans were drawn up, orders placed and a great deal of material already on its way west. This he found "a most extraordinary performance in wartime."

The British agreed. They were, Laidlaw wrote on 9 February, "greatly impressed and gratified by the vigour with which you are proceeding with Habbakuk." Churchill, he noted, "is taking a violent and continuous personal interest." Meanwhile the work continued at a rapid pace, with Mackenzie coming to feel that the identification of practical difficulties confronting the project was the most that could be expected in the time available.

Those involved with Habbakuk tended to fall into two camps, the enthusiasts and the complete sceptics. Another of Mackenzie's men in London, Allen Shenstone, was so impressed with the operational importance of the bergships that he urged the setting up of an organization under one man with full decision-making authority to push the project through. That, Mackenzie responded, was more or less the situation that existed, as he had devoted most of his time for two months to Habbakuk "as no one else could carry sufficient authority to get necessary action and decisions."

High Commissioner Massey was also an enthusiast, though he realized from the reports of the scientists that the obstacles were formidable. "Building sites must be selected," he wrote Mountbatten on 20 March, "which can provide cold weather, deep water, railway facilities and adequate labour, and on the basis of our present knowledge the organization must apparently procure many hundred thousand tons of pulp in competition with the newspapers. It would appear that the possibility of success this year will soon vanish entirely."

Mountbatten passed this along to the prime minister, eliciting a further Churchillian rumble addressed to Mackenzie King, asking for his "vehement support." Mountbatten also sent Pyke and Professor J.D. Bernal, another member of his staff, to Canada to check out the work being done and ensure that King was fully cognizant of the project and its importance.

Mackenzie found them "a queer looking team" but was obviously fascinated by Pyke, who in appearance and manner was virtually a caricature of the eccentric Englishman. A lengthy passage in his diary reveals a grudging respect for Pyke's intelligence despite his maddening peculiarities:

National War Museum, Ottawa

Lord Louis Mountbatten was an early supporter of the Habbakuk idea. He was also a moving force behind the Dieppe raid and is seen here giving a pep talk to Canadian troops.

> All together he is a most unusual type and most people think he is absolutely mad. He is not mad. He thinks in a most unorthodox way. The strange thing is that he brings to light a lot of confused thinking which has become conventional. He never does anything because other people do it. He lands in this country without any gloves and with only a light raincoat to embark upon a trip into the Arctic weather. When we were in the mountains he went skiing in the most grotesque outfit — a little hat on the top of his head with his muffler and raincoat and a pair of spats ... He reads all night and sleeps all day. He has moments of what amounts to intellectual intoxication when he is seized with his ideas. He has now brought off for Mountbatten a couple of good ideas and if Habbakuk comes off it will be another triumph.
>
> Travelling with Pyke is like travelling with a small child. You turn around and he is not there and then you worry that he is going to miss the train and he finally turns up at the last moment when all is about to be lost.

Along with Churchill's missive to King came an official request from the Dominions Office to have the Canadian government assume responsibility for the project and appoint an engineering staff. Mackenzie thought this a "sizeable order" and found it "most extraordinary the casual way in which projects of large magnitude get requested and presented."

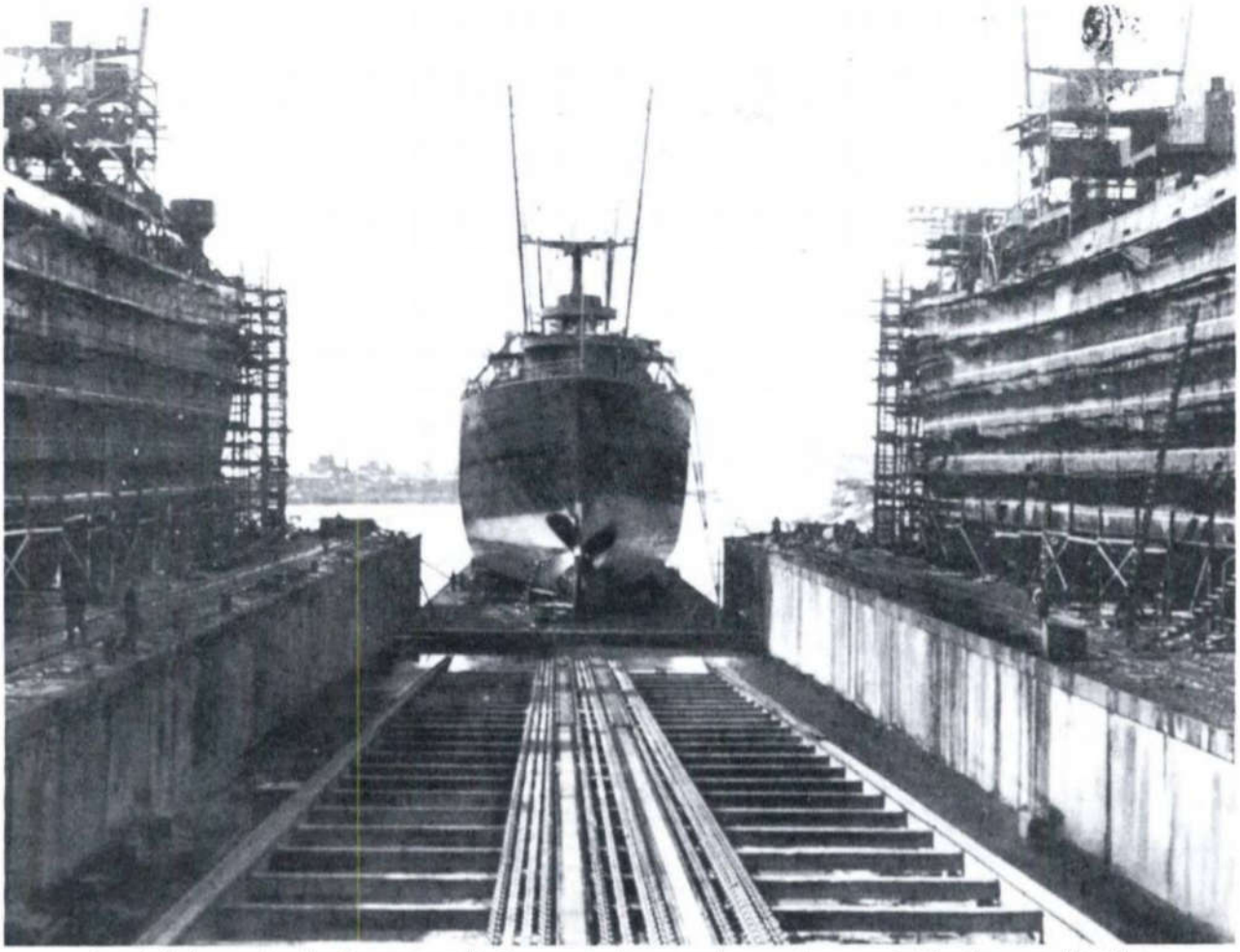
Pyke must have been on his best behaviour when he and Bernal saw Mackenzie King on 29 March, for that inveterate diarist had little to say about their meeting. His support for the project certainly lacked the vehemence that Churchill sought though he did find it "far from fanciful; likely to be a real service. Pretty expensive and costly experimentation. Was greatly interested at what has already been achieved. The two experts spoke in the highest terms of what our men have accomplished in their experiments thus far."

As the work progressed Mackenzie became increasingly aware of the great difficulties involved, particularly in regard to construction. He concluded that their timetable was unrealistic and that in fact it was possible that "the thing can never be built." By the end of April he was also fed up with the two Englishmen, insisting that they "come down to earth and get down to matters of design and stop talking about details.... I have insisted that they get immediately down to the drafting table, get out designs, and make calculations of quantities, time, total man hours involved, etc."

Mackenzie clearly felt it was his job to confront Pyke's visionary scheme with a hard dose of reality. At the beginning of May he again saw C.D. Howe, who appointed him his representative on all Habbakuk matters and agreed that a cautious approach was best. The Canadian government would not make a committment one way or the other to Habbakuk until the researchers had reached a firm conclusion. Three days later, on 4 May, Mackenzie told an unhappy Bernal that the schedule was impossible; a Habbakuk, as the bergship itself was now being called, could not be built by the spring of 1944 as planned.

Shortly afterwards Mackenzie left for England, a long-awaited trip during which the Habbakuk project was but one of a number of items on his packed schedule. On the tenth he attended a dinner party at the High Commissioner's where he told a disappointed but philosophical Mountbatten that 1944 was out of the question. This injection of a dose of realism was generally welcomed, he believed, and "everyone felt that for the first time the entire project had been brought down to earth." The Deputy First Sea Lord, Sir Charles Kennedy-Purvis, said it was "the first sense he had heard re Habbakuk since it started."

Mackenzie found that scepticism about the project was widespread. Several scientists he talked to were "obviously relieved to find we had such sound views and I think our Canadian stock is at a high level." This support buoyed Mackenzie, whose own scorn was deepening. On the nineteenth he attended a meeting of Combined Operations chaired by Mountbatten; he was not impressed with Bernal, who "as usual stated opinions as if they were facts", nor with Pyke who kept grinning like an imbecile. "I can't imagine such a situation happening in Canada," he fumed, "*i.e.* a royal Prince with two mad advisers holding out against the entire weight of sound professional opinions of a country."



It gradually became clear that ships constructed in the conventional way were cheaper and more practical than the proposed ice ships.

Five days later he attended a second meeting where he "blew up" when Bernal had the gall to claim that all the major problems had been solved with only minor matters remaining. He settled down after the rest "agreed on my statement of the situation." He received further reinforcement for his views — if any was needed — from General McNaughton, who told him that Mountbatten was a "wild man" and that both he and Churchill had backed "some very fantastic schemes." Mackenzie patted himself on the back for not falling prey to "all the seductive advances that can be made by such people.... I think everyone here of sense," he smugly concluded, "felt we in Canada were going to lend our support to a foolish proposition and they are most relieved that I am standing firm on a very sensible and sound basis."

Mackenzie needed all his firmness when he attended a meeting on 10 June at 10 Downing Street. Standing up to Churchill was no easy matter, especially when he was clearly annoyed at the inability to keep to the original schedule. Mackenzie was not impressed by the prime minister, who he felt was "a dictator who does not take objections kindly," nor by his advisors, who despite their own dislike of the project, would criticize only details. When it was his turn to speak, Mackenzie bluntly stated that it was impossible to meet Churchill's wishes in the matter. The upshot was another committee to investigate the use of other materials in building a Habbakuk.

Churchill's bulldog tenacity was never better exemplified than in his committment to this project. It had captured his imagination and he was unwilling to let it fall by the wayside without a struggle. The next step was to enlist the support of the Americans, which he proposed to do at the Quebec Conference held at the end of August 1943. Here he conferred with Roosevelt — with Mackenzie King along for the photo opportunities — while the British and American Chiefs of Staff also met. The upshot was a laconic statement in the

National Archives of Canada

A convoy of conventional ships moves across the Atlantic escorted by a VLR Liberator aircraft.

official proceedings agreeing to the construction of a section of a Habbakuk and the continuation of studies necessary for the completion of a full-sized ship, to be overseen by a joint British-American-Canadian board. Behind that decision lay a farcical scene more reminiscent of a Peter Sellers movie than the deliberations of the highest Allied political and military authorities.

As Churchill recounted in his war memoirs, two blocks were wheeled into the conference room, one made of ice and one of pykrete. The American General H.H. Arnold was invited to attack them with a chopper. He easily split the ice but made scarcely a dent on the pykrete, receiving quite a jarring in the process. Mountbatten then pulled out a revolver and blazed away. The ice shattered but the bullet that struck the pykrete ricocheted. There are different versions of the outcome. One story has it that the bullet narrowly missed a British officer, another that it nicked the leg of Admiral Ernest King of the American Navy. Horrified officers waiting outside the room wondered who was shooting at whom.

Despite the performance of the pykrete and the creation of the board, this was really Habbakuk's last gasp. Mackenzie had lunch with Mountbatten in Quebec and found him as keen about the project as ever and convinced that the Americans were impressed. In fact, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had determined that the construction of a full size Habbakuk was only feasible by extraordinary effort and the stoppage of work on other essential projects, which could not be justified. The Americans were not enthusiastic and were pressed into agreeing to as much as they did by Churchill's relentless pressure.

As Mackenzie noted on 11 September after talking with Bernal in Washington, the Americans only went back on their original view that "the thing was no good" after they were "cajoled and bullied and worn out by Churchill." He was pleased to hear that Admiral King was "very tough" and had exploded as Mackenzie had in England "at the suggestion that all the major problems were solved."

That was far from the case, as Mackenzie had made clear in a report to C.D. Howe four days earlier. He gave the minister a summary of the work that had been done in Canada, an impressive accomplishment in the circumstances. Research had been carried out at three Western universities, Jasper and Lake Louise and at three NRC labs in Ottawa, resulting in the obtaining of "much useful scientific and technical data." The Montreal Engineering Company had been hired to study the engineering and construction problems and work on refrigeration had been done at the National Harbours Board in Montreal.

Useful experimental work on the nature of ice had, in fact, been carried out. Perhaps most interesting was the

construction of a model on Patricia Lake, near Jasper. Made of ice, not pykrete, it was 60 by 30 by 19 1/2 feet and was kept frozen right through the summer months. As C.D. Niven of the NRC noted after the war, the model did not deteriorate at all until the machinery was removed; based on experiments with pykrete, eventual melting would have theoretically been much slower if that material had been used.

As a result of all this effort, Mackenzie reported, several conclusions could be drawn, foremost of which was the impossibility of building a Habbakuk by the following spring. There were, he continued, no technical or scientific reasons why it could not be built; the essential difficulties were in engineering design and construction. However, it could not be built cheaply, the cost estimates being, in fact, two to three times greater than the original British estimates. Construction could not be undertaken by Canada alone "without serious interference with existing war programs." It was only feasible to proceed in co-operation with the U.S. "if the tactical and strategical needs indicate that Habbakuks in some form should be built." The Combined Chiefs had already decided that was not the case.

Howe agreed that Canada had gone as far as possible with Habbakuk and that the government "will not wish to be involved in further extensions of this project ... Our war programme has been stretched to its limit, and we are moving in the direction of reducing the programme in conformity with our dwindling manpower resources."

The joint board was appointed and began meeting but it was soon apparent that Habbakuk was dead. The Canadian members were Air Vice-Marshall G.V. Walsh of the RCAF and Construction Captain A.W. Harrison of the Royal Canadian Navy. They were not fully aware of how involved Canada had been to that point, as the project had been treated as top secret, a fact that Harrison complained about to the Chief of Naval Staff. He also expressed awe at what was involved in the building of a Habbakuk:

> In the sketch design phase it is a vessel 2,000 ft. long by 300 ft. wide by 150 ft. draught and 50 ft. freeboard and has a displacement of over 2,000,000 tons. It is built primarily of Pykrete and one vessel will require something of the order of 300,000 tons of wood pulp. It will have to be built in a fairly isolated spot in sheltered water where there is sufficient depth of water to take the vessel as she is being built. I understand it will take something like 6 to 8,000 men a year to build. I should imagine the cost will be anything from 50 to 100,000,000 dollars.

By comparison, the largest aircraft carrier of the time was approximately 1,000 by 113 feet.

The first meeting of the board was held on 12 October 1943. The members determined that they required from higher authority a clear definition of the military objectives of Habbakuk and of the operational characteristics necessary to fulfill them. Higher authority clearly had other things on its mind; they were still waiting to hear at the end of the year and felt themselves to be in an impossible position. Finally the charade was ended with the official dissolution of the board on 1 March 1944.

There was no chance that the project would proceed once it became apparent that the theoretical benefits of Pyke's bergships — speed and cheapness of construction — were unobtainable. There was no advantage to building ships out of pykrete when conventional steel ships could be produced more quickly and at lesser cost. The project would have collapsed in the summer of 1943 except for Churchill's obsessive attachment to it.

Pyke's idea was a fascinating but ultimately impractical one that only got as far as it did because of the top level support he attracted. Habbakuk distracted Mackenzie's attention from more important projects for a period of several months and, in the opinion of W.E. Knowles Middleton, author of a history of physics at the NRC, "was destined to waste an uncountable number of valuable man-hours before it was abandoned as impracticable".

'Our war programme has been stretched to its limit ...'

As for Pyke himself, he lost his chief supporter when Mountbatten left Combined Operations in October 1943. The staff was reduced and Pyke was transferred to the Admiralty where there was little real work for him. After the war he worked for a research group preparing a report concerning the planned National Health Service and achieved a brief notoriety through broadcasts of his ideas concerning the shape of the future on the BBC. Then in February 1948 he took his own life, ending the career of a remarkable, if eccentric, thinker who had an unexpected effect on Canada's scientific effort during the Second World War. ◆

F.J. McEvoy lives in Gloucester, Ontario. His article "Diplomats at War" appeared in the October/November 1990 issue of "The Beaver".

Mrs. Valiant-for-Truth

By Anne Morton

FIRING THE HEATHER
The Life and Times
of Nellie McClung

By Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis, Fifth House, Saskatoon, 1993. 368 pp., illus. $14.95 (paper), $26.95 (hardcover).

Although it has been over 40 years since the trumpets sounded on the other side for Nellie Mooney McClung (1873-1951), there is a sense in which she has remained with us. At the time this review is being written, book stores are piled high with Christmas offerings, and at least one Winnipeg book store has stacks of *Firing the Heather* right beside the autobiographical *opera* of Pierre Trudeau and Margaret Thatcher. (I hope at least some readers found Nellie in their Christmas stockings and got the New Year off to a good start by reading the life of one who left her country in her debt rather than the lives of those who left their countries *in debt*.)

Nellie's first novel, the best-selling *Sowing Seeds in Danny* (1908), was most recently reprinted in 1965; copies of it are still to be found on the shelves of the Winnipeg Public Library system, which they would not be if people were not taking them out. Some of her other books have been reprinted fairly recently and in 1992 the University of Toronto Press brought out a re-issue of the 1921 novel, *Purple Springs*, with an excellent introduction by Randi Warne on Nellie and the fight for women's suffrage in Manitoba. Some of you may have been lucky enough to catch Randi's dramatic monologues as Nellie, either in person or over the CBC airwaves.

In 1989 Alberta's Persons Case Collective produced the video, *Now That We Are Persons*, as part of a 60th anniversary celebration of the successful conclusion of the "Persons Case" when the "Famous Five" — Nellie, Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Edwards ("coal-heavers and plough-pushers from Alberta", as Emily Murphy called them, in jocular contrast to the do-nothing ladies of the East) — won from the Privy Council the declaration that women were "persons" who could hold public office as Canadian senators. Even more recently, one of the TV Heritage Minutes, sponsored by what Nellie would call "liquor interests", has been presenting a perky little Nell and a Rodmond Roblin who looks as if he couldn't find the way to the Manitoba Club. While not a big fan of this particular minute, I have to admit that at least it does remind Canadians that the campaign for women's suffrage in this country was conducted with laughter and good humour, unlike Britain, where the campaign was marked by shameful violence and brutality, and unlike Canada today, where sticking your finger in your eye and crying has become a popular mode of public discourse.

Nellie McClung

Firing the Heather, however, is the first "scholarly yet readable" biography, as its authors call it, to have appeared. In so saying, I do not intend to slight the contribution of Candace Savage and her 1979 *Our Nell: A Scrapbook Biography of Nellie L. McClung,* which makes a marvellous Nellie McClung companion, both to read through with delight and to dip into again and again; the aims and achievements of *Firing the Heather* are different, that's all. It is natural to be curious when a book is written by two people — how did they manage it? And the circumstances in which this book was written are so touching and speak so well of all concerned, that they are worth relating. The late Mary Hallett, a professor of history at the University of Saskatchewan, worked on the historical chapters with the assistance of Marilyn Davis, a professor of English at the same institution until her retirement. Davis wrote on her own the chapter, "Antiromantic Fiction of a Feminist", which is a significant contribution to the worthy cause of taking Nellie's fiction as seriously as it deserves. During the illness which was to end

Mary Hallett's life in 1986, the two authors revised the book with the assistance of Michael Hayden and Ramsay Cook. After Hallett's death, Davis was faced with the task of updating the book's secondary source material on women's history. Here Georgina Taylor, Saskatchewan historian and champion of Violet McNaughton, came to her aid, turning up at her door one day "with four grocery bags filled with books and articles in women's history written since Mary's death." Saskatchewan, the one Western province in which Nellie did not live, has certainly done itself proud by the generous and co-operative spirit in which this book has been written. Nellie would have approved.

If you do not know much more of Nellie McClung than that she was a lady who made folks laugh at a premier of Manitoba (not, on the whole, a mirth-provoking group), hated drink and had a small son who was taught to say, "I'm Mark McClung. I'm the son of a suffragette and never knew a mother's love", then this book will give her to you whole. Her personality shines before us in all her roles — as the daughter of John Mooney from County Tipperary and Letitia McCurdy from Dundee, as the wife for over 50 years of Wes McClung and the mother of their five children, and as successful activist, author and public speaker — warm-hearted and witty, a life-long fighter against injustice and suffering, determined to be a voice for the voiceless from her girlhood, when she spoke up for the Métis in the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, to her later years when she pleaded for the admission of Jewish refugees to Canada and the fair treatment of Canadians of Japanese origin.

But the book does more than draw a portrait of Nellie, and this is what is so important about it. With a woman as good, as lovable, and so much plain fun, as Nellie, it is easy to admire her (and ourselves, as sister Westerners) and then pass on. We can fall into the same error of which Dr. Johnson accused his friend, the poet Richard Savage, who, he said "mistook the love for the practice of virtue, and was indeed not so much a good man as the friend of goodness."

Now, it was the purpose of Nellie's public life not to make her audience admire her as an end in itself but to inspire them to the practice of virtue, to "fire the heather". She believed that "change happens best in the context of a relationship. People are more likely to hear the prophetic word when it comes from someone they trust." These words of Nellie's are quoted on the last page of the book, and when I read them I felt that yes, the book had altered and deepened my relationship with Nellie. My admiration for her has not diminished in the slightest, yet I also have a much stronger sense of her as a woman with her own tough row to hoe and her own salvation to work out.

The book achieves this in two ways. First, by positioning Nellie in the context of her times, so that we understand her as a woman not only acting upon but also *being* acted upon by the events and social currents of her world. Like the rest of us, Nellie had to deal with what she read in the newspapers and saw on the streets and, like the rest of us, she had to do this in terms of the person she thought she should be. The understanding the book gives us of how Nellie achieved her personality is the second way in which our relationship with her is deepened.

There is no need to fear that the book contains ten-cent psychoanalysis and horrid revelations. Instead, it explores, tactfully and sympathetically, the Nellie behind the beloved public figure. This could not have been easy to do. Most of Nellie's diaries have been destroyed and, like many people of her cultural background, she felt that fear and sorrow were not emotions for public display. When her eldest son took his own life, she reacted by growing "very, very silent". Anger, however, and laughter, especially laughter, she had no qualms about releasing. There is a story that once she and Emily Murphy emerged from an elevator in the Macdonald Hotel laughing so heartily that the story flew around Edmonton that they had been drunk as lords. Yet, by an attentive and intelligent handling of such evidence as there is for Nellie's private side, the authors have given us Nellie as a complex, questing woman, a character always in process. Their treatment of her childhood is particularly fine. We come to realize that the first voiceless person Nellie found a voice for was herself, as she struggled against her mother's conventional ideas of womanly behaviour. In the end, it is people who inspire us to work for a better country, a better world. That is what Nellie tried to do during her life and, we can hope, she will go on doing as a result of this warmly human biography. ◆

Anne Morton is an archivist with an interest in women's history.

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A Very Singular Life

By Allan Levine

MEMOIRS

By Pierre Elliott Trudeau. McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1993. 379 pp., illus. $35.00.

It should come as no surprise to students of Canadian political history that Pierre Trudeau has long regarded regret as a "useless emotion". As prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and 1980 to 1984, he rarely, if ever, admitted in public to making a mistake and never second-guessed himself. Canadians could never accuse Trudeau of lacking confidence in his actions.

This is the side of Trudeau's personality that is most clearly evident in *Memoirs*, the story of his life in his own words — at least in theory. For many years Trudeau resisted writing his autobiography, believing that such an endeavor is, in his words, "self-aggrandizing". It is also a lot of hard work. When he retired in 1984, Trudeau had other things on his mind — his teenage sons, travelling, and other worldly and intellectual pursuits. Finally after prodding from associates, he agreed to tape a series of French and English interviews that would serve as the basis of a televised memoir. From this project came the publication of this expensive book, a written and illustrated version of Trudeau's filmed interviews prepared by a team of experts and edited by the former prime minister.

Should we have expected more of a man with such obvious intellectual talents and capabilities? The answer is yes, but Trudeau certainly would not care how we feel. He has been rather indifferent to his place in Canadian history (he very rarely grants interviews, for example) and he has always had a bit of a selfish streak to him, doing what he wants when he wants to do it. Consider this minor, but revealing, episode he describes: In 1940, as the Second World War was underway, Trudeau was beginning his legal studies at the Université de Montréal and he was not interested in European battles or in talking about these events.

Pierre Trudeau

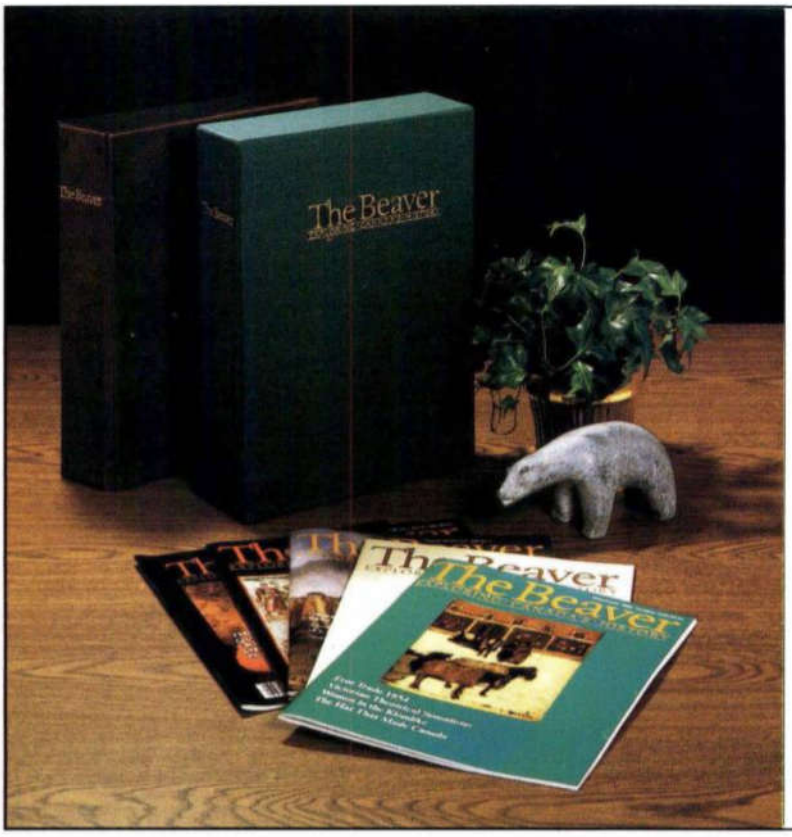
"But the instinct that has always made me go against prevailing opinion caused me to affect a certain air of indifference," he writes. "So there was a war? Tough. It wouldn't stop me from concentrating on my studies so long as that was possible."

Trudeau, himself, would be the first person to admit that television rarely moves beyond the superficial in both fact and analysis. And that is the main criticism of this TV book: Trudeau in most instances only gives readers an overview of his public life and work, providing very few glimpses into his inner soul. Trudeau never has been one to gossip or be personal in public, and he offers little in the way of real insight into the many politicians and statesmen who have crossed his path. What is more, alongside photographs of himself with world leaders, he (or his publisher) includes complimentary comments written about him by them. It could never be said about Pierre Trudeau that he had a small ego.

Given his penchant for privacy, he reveals little about his life with his ex-wife Margaret or any other details of his life outside politics. The closest we come to seeing the real Trudeau is when he describes the death of his gregarious father Charlie in 1935. Pierre was fifteen years old. He writes, "How can I describe what I felt at that moment? In a split second, I felt the whole world go empty. His death truly felt like the end of the world. That's the only way I can put it."

The bulk of the book is, however, more concerned with his years as prime minister. While he condemns other politicians for producing self-serving memoirs, he falls into the same trap. Whether he is discussing the economy or the constitution, Trudeau's course of action seemed, in his view and in almost every instance, to have been the correct one.

He is particularly certain and self-assured in assessing his handling of the 1970 FLQ Crisis. If there were mistakes made — by the zealous RCMP and Quebec police, for instance — they were committed by lesser men than he. Trudeau fervently holds the view that his decisions to invoke the War Measures Act (at the request of both Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa and Montreal Mayor Jean Drapeau), and to never negotiate with terrorists were the only ones he could have



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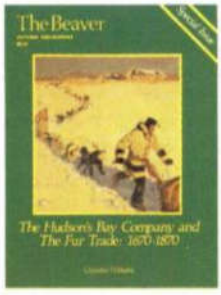

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then made. While he deeply mourned the death of his friend Pierre Laporte, the Quebec cabinet minister who was murdered, he rightly concludes that had he not invoked the War Measures Act when he did he would have been accused later of placing his own judgment "ahead of that of more interested parties." He adds: "And at the same time, I would be held responsible for the eventual death of Pierre Laporte."

Trudeau is most passionate and honest when it comes to the subject of Quebec and the constitution. He has disdained and fought against the perpetuation of extreme nationalism, separatism, and the idea that Quebec is not a province like the others. Passionately, he denounces those French nationalists who have acted as spokesmen for the province. "These nationalists," he maintains, "are speaking only for themselves: they are not Quebec". He believes that his position and fight with his rival René Lévesque ("a bit of a prima donna", in his opinion) and other separatists were vindicated by the results of the 1980 Quebec referendum that rejected sovereignty-association.

From his days as writer with *Cité Libre,* the magazine he helped found in the 1950s, his views on the benefits of federalism with a strong central government have been true and consistent. Typically, he had little patience for premiers who saw matters in a different light and condemns those who wanted to turn the country into a "confederation of shopping centres." Still, his life's work was only partially fulfilled by the Constitution Act of 1982 with an amending formula that he did not especially favour, and a charter of rights with a limiting notwithstanding clause imposed upon him by the provincial premiers. Trudeau would be the first to concede, however, that such are the practical realities of politics.

Despite the deficiencies in *Memoirs,* there is, nevertheless, something appealing about this book. Reading about Trudeau's time in office reminds us again why so many of us found him such an attractive and compelling leader. In these pages can be found the essential Trudeau; not only the style and charisma, but equally the man of vision, the great defender of individual freedom, and the champion of the weak. Even with all his flaws Pierre Trudeau is, in recent memory, the prime minister who stands out from all the rest, and undoubtedly will for many years to come. ◆

Allan Levine is the author of "Scrum Wars: The Prime Ministers and the Media."

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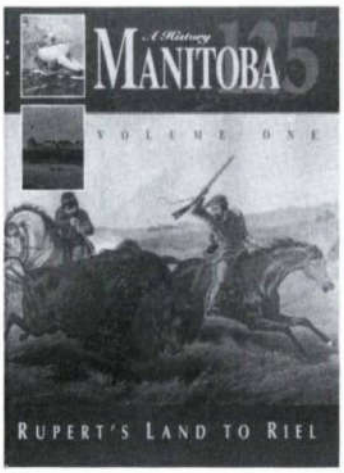

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Politicians and the Press

By Robert Saunders

SCRUM WARS
The Prime Ministers and the Media

By Allan Levine. Dundurn Press, Toronto, 1993. 389 pp., illus. $29.99.

The politician has always been abused. To the Elizabethans he was a devious plotter, an intriguer, a man steeped in guile. That is the sense in which Shakespeare used the word when he had Lear rail against the "scurvy politician" who "seems to see the things he doth not".

The reputation of the politician is not much better today. During last fall's election we were told that Canadians were fed up with the antics of their representatives in Parliament, and the election results seemed to indicate that this perception was all too true.

The pilloried politician customarily replies that his bad image is all the fault of malicious journalism. The media, so the accusation goes, distort what politicians say and cast aspersions on the nobility of their aims and motives. A reader of Allan Levine's *Scrum Wars* may well conclude that the politician is not far wrong.

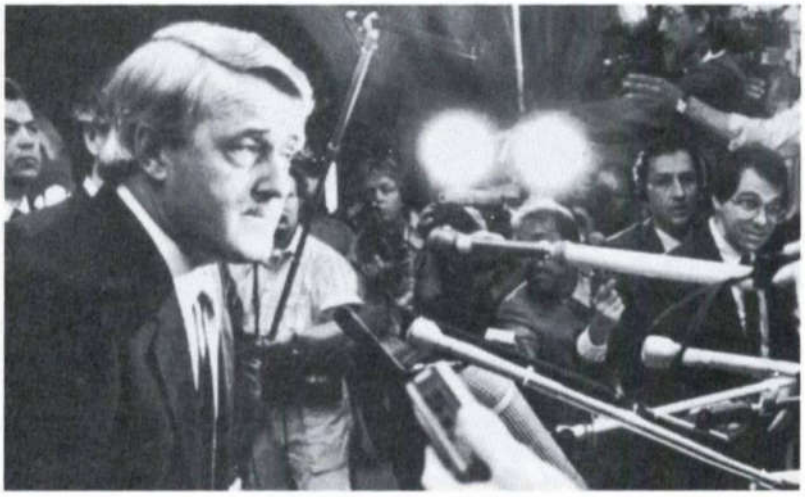
In his dissection of the Ottawa press corps, Levine focuses on the constantly-changing relationship between journalists and various prime ministers from John A. Macdonald to Kim Campbell and he uses what has been dubbed the scrum — a metaphor, of course, from English rugby — to symbolize all that he deplores in that relationship. We have all seen the scrum on our television screens. An unlucky prime minister or cabinet minister has been cornered by a gaggle of reporters who are shouting questions at him, thrusting microphones in his face and generally making life miserable for their victim. In his concluding paragraph, Levine sums up his criticism of this farce:

> The time has come to take a step back. Too often there is little distinction made between what the public has a right to know and what journalists say it should know. The chaos of the scrum must be controlled. Otherwise, fewer and fewer talented individuals will choose a career in politics. Canadians will then not get the leaders they want, but those deemed acceptable by the members of the media.

Levine's indictment is all the more telling because of the calm, dispassionate tone in which it is delivered. He neither hectors nor scolds but writes in an easy, colloquial style enlivened by flashes of wit. His title may be thought to verge on the theatrical, but this is a carefully-researched book deserving of serious study.

What can be said in defence of the press corps? James Reston, the veteran American journalist, wrote recently, in his usual generous-hearted way, that young reporters today have exposed more corruption than old-timers such as himself ever did and that they have "helped rid [Washington] of many certified scoundrels". Cannot the same be said of the Ottawa media? If there is corruption in high places, surely reporters have a duty to sound the alarm even if this means first a certain amount of rude poking and prying.

Unfortunately for the journalist, Levine has anticipated and discounted this defence. The so-called



Brian Mulroney faces the Press.

scandals dredged up recently for the public to gloat over have been, for the most part, of the utmost insignificance, he says. Who really cares how many Gucci loafers Mulroney is supposed to have in his cupboard, or whether John Turner takes a few more drinks at a party than reporters think is proper? This focus on the trivial, Levine implies, is far removed from the best traditions of crusading journalism.

Levine writes perceptively of the Ottawa scene. He is, for instance, quite aware that some politicians actually welcome the scrum and use it to advance their careers. Bill Bennett, when he was premier of British Columbia, once managed to manoeuvre himself into no less than three different scrums in a single afternoon, thus ensuring coverage for himself on that evening's television. He had nothing of any importance to say, but his image was before the public and that was what mattered.

Levine's judgement as an historian is always balanced and sensible, but he is at his best in his assessment of the two major Conservative prime ministers of the past half century. He points out that the overwhelming Tory victory in 1958 was, in the long run, bad both for the party and for John Diefenbaker personally. It led the Chief to suppose that he was invincible and this hubris lay at the root of the exceptionally bad relations he was later to have with the press corps.

Levine is far more sympathetic to Mulroney than most commentators have so far managed to be. He notes that Mulroney was at first eager to be friendly with the Press Gallery. Trudeau had treated journalists with icy contempt but Mulroney craved their respect and affection. This anxiety to be liked made the "new boy" in Ottawa vulnerable to bullying by callous reporters. Ottawa, in many ways, is not unlike a badly-run private school.

Levine also has the historian's gift of being able to grasp the significance of what, at first glance, might seem comparatively unimportant. Thus he notes that the new medium of television in the mid-1950s revealed the lines of weariness and strain etched on St. Laurent's face and thereby did much to destroy the image of a sprightly, genial "Uncle Louis".

To take another example, Levine points out — citing Charles Lynch as his source — that Trudeau's habit of speaking in hushed tones when answering reporters' questions in corridor encounters forced journalists to crowd around him and thus did much to create the infamous scrum. It is on such trivial phenomena as these — a creased face or a muttered answer — that history turns.

More than a third of Levine's book deals with the period after 1957 and this is fair enough since it was during the Diefenbaker years that relations between the media and the prime minister grew noticeably more raucous and hostile. Nevertheless, readers of *The Beaver* will likely be at least as much interested in Levine's account of Ottawa battles of earlier years.

Anthony Trollope in his 1875 novel *The Way We Live Now* has one of his characters say that "the common object of all papers [is] helping friends and destroying enemies" and if this was true in Britain, it was even truer in the colonies, particularly as far as destroying enemies went. Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, press coverage of events in Ottawa was nakedly partisan.

Connoisseurs of the art might argue that the invective employed by the post-Confederation press lacked some of the savage zest so evident in, for example, William Lyon Mackenzie's mauling of the Family Compact in the 1820s and 1830s but, for all that, journalists in the later years of the nineteenth century could be hard-hitting enough. During the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Washington in 1871, the *Toronto Globe* denounced John A. Macdonald as "a poor parody of a statesman" and accused him of lacking both moral and intellectual strength. A couple of years later, during the furore caused by the Pacific Scandal, the same paper portrayed Macdonald as "the Hector of corruption" who had "defied all the principles of right and justice, every dictate of morality, every sanction of conscience, every prescription of decency which belongs to the people of Canada".

Not to be outdone, the *Toronto Mail* branded Macdonald's political rival, Alexander Mackenzie, "a pharaisical brawler, rowdy rhetorician and the incarnation of egotism". Politics was not a trade for the thin-skinned.

Newspapers were quite unashamed of their partisanship. It was what their readers expected and wanted. In 1899 a group of wealthy Toronto Liberals, feeling that the *Globe* had become insufficiently robust in its support of Laurier, bought the struggling *Evening Star* for $32,000 and installed Joseph Atkinson as its editor. Atkinson

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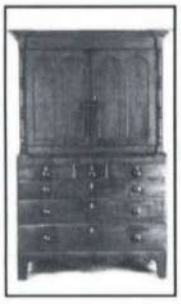

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knew what his paper's owners required of him. "I understand the motive...is to have not only an evening Liberal paper but one that will be more 'ardent' and reliable than the *Globe* in the support it gives the party." There was no nonsense about "objectivity" in that.

As the twentieth century progressed, much of the old buccaneer spirit evaporated. Times were changing, issues were becoming more complex and probably journalists were, on the whole better educated. Press coverage grew politer — for good or ill — and gradually reporters and politicians became, in a sense, partners. Levine devotes some interesting pages to the career of Grant Dexter of the *Winnipeg Free Press,* perhaps the best newspaperman to sit in the Press Gallery. Mackenzie King consulted him on a number of occasions to ascertain his views, and those of his editor, John W. Dafoe, on trends in Western Canada and in the country as a whole.

Later, during the Diefenbaker era, Dexter became what amounted to a policy adviser to the new Liberal leader, L.B. Pearson. Such close cooperation between a reporter and a potential prime minister would be inconceivable in the more adversarial atmosphere that prevails in Ottawa today.

Levine, who teaches at St. John's-Ravenscourt School in Winnipeg, is the author of an earlier book on Winnipeg's grain trade, and he has also edited a series of essays on Canadian mayors. As well, he has written widely for a number of publications, including *The Beaver. Scrum Wars* has comprehensive notes, a good index and a useful bibliography, all evidence of the effort and research that went into the writing of this thought-provoking and entertaining book. ◆

Robert Saunders is a former member of the editorial board of the "Winnipeg Free Press."

Unsolved Mystery

By Robert Coutts

DEAD SILENCE
The Greatest Mystery in Arctic Discovery

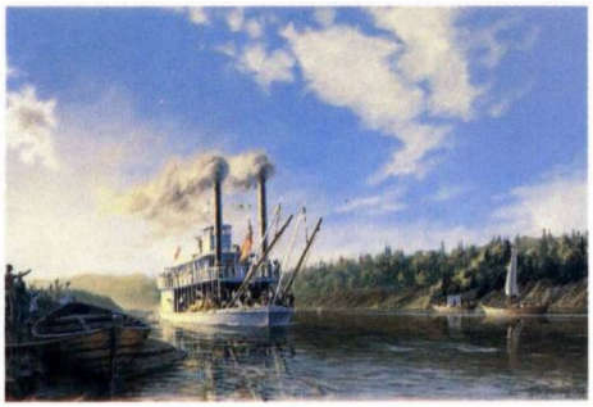
By John Geiger and Owen Beattie. Viking/Penguin, Toronto, 1993. 219 pp., illus. $29.99.

You are with the first Opertunity of Wind and Weathr. to Depart Gravesend on your Intended Voyage by Gods Permission to find out the Streight of Annian in Order to Discover Gold and Other Valuable Commodities to the Northward...

With these instructions the Hudson's Bay Company in 1719 sent James Knight, the eighty-year-old former Governor of its North American posts, to Hudson Bay to search for precious metals and the North West Passage; the fabled "Strait of Anian" of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century maritime imagination. Sailing aboard two ships — the *Albany,* an 80-ton frigate, and the 40-ton sloop *Discovery* — the octogenarian Company servant and his crew of 40 were ultimately to perish on Marble Island, a large windswept and treeless island located off the northwest coast of Hudson Bay near the modern community of Rankin Inlet. In the grand tradition of arctic discovery Knight and company seemed to "vanish into thin air" (though of course Inuit peoples of the region knew of their fate) and it was not until some 45 years later that the first solid evidence — both oral and physical — of the tragedy was discovered on Marble Island by the HBC whaling master Joseph Stevens and first mate Samuel Hearne.

Dead Silence by John Geiger and Owen Beattie, the forensic anthropologist who wrote the best-selling but controversial book *Frozen In Time,* an examination of the fate of the Franklin expedition, analyzes the various and often conflicting interpretations surrounding the Knight tragedy, described by the authors as "the Greatest Mystery in Arctic Discovery". Using both archival and archaeological evidence, Geiger and Beattie attempt to reconstruct the story of the Knight expedition, raising perhaps more questions about the fate of these "Unhappey Sufferars" than they are able to answer. A four-year archaeological investigation of Knight's known wintering site at the east end of Marble Island supplemented an extensive review of the documentary record, a record that while largely familiar to northern scholars for many decades, has received only cursory analysis in the historical literature. Employing what Glyndwr Williams describes in his preface to the book as a combination of "scientific skills and historical imagination" the authors offer a variety of speculations regarding the tragedy, including the "possible complicity" of Knight's rival Henry Kelsey, the Company's seeming indifference to the fate of the expedition, as well as a darker explanation for Samuel Hearne's later "misinterpretations" of the physical evidence of the disaster.

While *Dead Silence* deals ostensibly with the ill-fated expedition of 1719-20, over a third of the book, roughly seventy-four pages, recounts the fairly well-known aspects of Knight's long career with the Hudson's Bay Company. Arriving as a young shipwright at



Steamer *Northcote* at Fort Edmonton, 1875

BY PETER RINDLISBACHER

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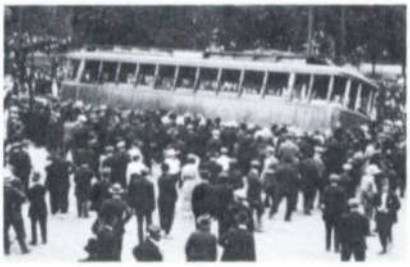

WINNIPEG 1919

The General Strike Re-examined

By J.M. Bumsted

The Beaver
June/July

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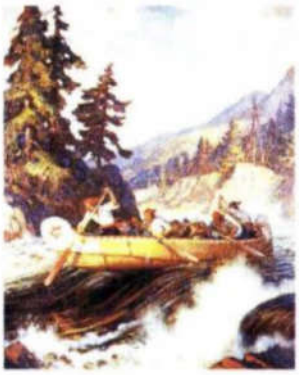
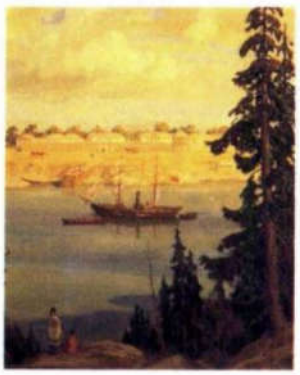
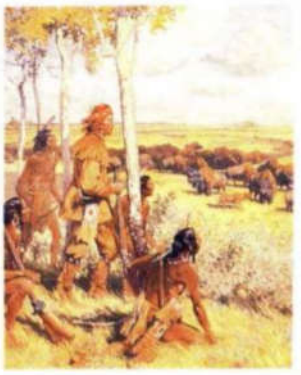
Historic Paintings by popular demand



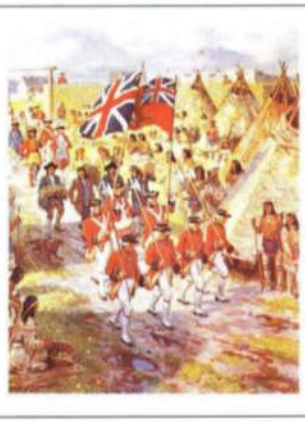
A. *Chief Trader Archibald McDonald Descending the Fraser*
By A. Sherriff Scott.



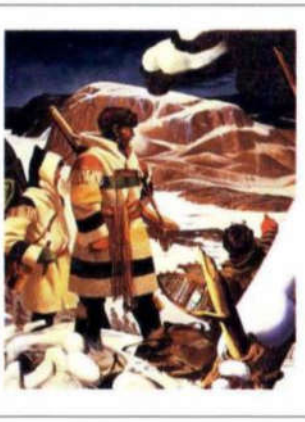
B. *S.S. "Beaver" Off Fort Victoria*
By A. Sherriff Scott.



C. *Kelsey Sees the Buffalo*
By C.W. Jefferys.



D. *Trading Ceremony at York Factory*
By A. Sherriff Scott.



E. *R.M. Ballantyne and Chief Trader George Barnston at Tadoussac, 1846*
By Charles Comfort.

F. *Battle in the Bay, 1697*
By Norman Wilkinson.

Over the years the Hudson's Bay Company has commissioned distinguished Canadian painters to create works depicting important events in the long history of the Company. Among the most popular works in the HBC collection are those pictured above by C.W. Jefferys, A. Sherriff Scott, Norman Wilkinson and Charles Comfort.

The Beaver is now offering quality reproductions of these works. These four-colour prints are sized 12½" x 16½", printed on fine stock and are suitable for framing. They are priced at **$11.98 each.**

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Charles Fort in 1676, Knight was later to become governor at York Fort and in 1717 established a post near the mouth of the Churchill River. Knight, unlike his contemporaries who served on the Bay, possessed a considerable number of Company shares and was appointed in his later years to the HBC governing committee in London. An enigmatic figure, Knight held strong views based on intelligence from his Chipewyan informants, including Thanadelthur the "Slave Woman", of the existence of valuable mineral deposits northwest of the Churchill River along the Coppermine. Reports of "yellow mettle" and copper in lumps "so bigg that three or 4 men cant lift it" appear regularly throughout his journal and led Knight to petition the Company to fund (along with his own private investment) an expedition to the northwest regions of Hudson Bay.

An archaeological survey carried out between 1989 and 1992 under the supervision of Owen Beattie concentrated on the known location of Knight's wintering site at the east end of Marble Island as well as at the underwater wrecks of the *Albany* and *Discovery*, presumed to lie in about four or five metres of water in the adjacent cove. Human remains and grave sites found near the wintering site proved to be of Inuit or later whaler origin and were believed to be the "great Number of graves" discovered by Hearne in 1767 and mistakenly thought by him to belong to the men of the Knight expedition. At the remains of Knight's house, a low-walled, 9 metres by 14.4 metres ruin, Beattie's crew excavated a large portion of the structure's interior. Within it they found a variety of artifacts from the doomed expedition, including a sixteenth-century coin, musket balls, shards of china, a pair of brass dividers used in charting a ship's course, pieces of fabric, footwear and bone fragments of human origin. An underwater survey located the wreck of the *Albany*, the remains of which were first discovered by a team of divers in 1971, as well as some nearby planking and ribs presumed to belong to the *Discovery*. These archaeological findings, when analyzed in conjunction with the surviving archival record, provide an interesting, multi-disciplinary approach to the many questions that still surround the fate of the Knight party. But it is the book's rather skimpy presentation of this archaeological data that creates difficulty. Although it seems that technical and methodological details were sacrificed by the authors in favour of readability, a more complete presentation of the research methods and findings would have lent greater credibility to the project.

In the end, however, their research has added little to the tale beyond some imaginative conjecture and an admission that "the mystery has

Books Received

Recently published books on North American history include:

The Man in the Mirror: A Life of Benedict Arnold. By Clare Brandt. Random House of Canada, Mississauga, 1994. 360 pp., illus. $32.50.

Legacies of Fear: Law and Politics in Quebec in the era of the French Revolution. By F. Murray Greenwood. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1993 (The Osgoode Society). 360 pp., illus. $40.00 (hardcover), $20.00 (paper).

Arthur Irwin: A Biography. By David MacKenzie. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1993. 323 pp., illus. $45.00.

A Narrative History of Fort Dunvegan. By Daniel Francis and Michael Payne. Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., Winnipeg, 1993. 186 pp., illus. $14.95.

The Living Past of Montreal. By R.D. Wilson and Eric McLean. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1993. 128 pp., illus. $17.95.

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deepened". Curiously, work by a team of divers and archaeologists in 1971 and 1972 led by Ralph Smith of Toronto is given only passing notice by Geiger and Beattie and only the careful reader will be aware that the wintering and wreck sites were reasonably well known before the 1989 fieldwork. In the early 1970s Smith's crew carried out excavations at the house remains on Quartzite Island, the findings of which were discussed in two unpublished reports, as well as in articles that appeared in *The Beaver* and in the northern journal *Musk-Ox*.

In both topic and writing style *Dead Silence* is intended largely for the ubiquitous "popular" audience and those attracted to stories of explorers who never return and apocryphal tales of survivors who exist for years among the Inuit. Readers who like their Arctic "haunting" and "mysterious" will generally enjoy this book. Although reasonably well researched, *Dead Silence* often slips into the kind of over-writing that sees archaeological finds inevitably described as "spectacular", "remarkable", or "haunting", and where visionary adventurers like Knight "search the black skies for a sign" or "dance into the vagaries of desire".

There is a distinctly commercial, almost sensational, quality to this book. Geiger and Beattie try overly hard to convince us that the disappearance of James Knight and his men almost three centuries ago is "the greatest mystery in arctic discovery". *Dead Silence,* however, leaves one with the impression that the Knight tragedy will indeed qualify as their "greatest mystery", at least until the next book. ◆

Robert Coutts is an historian with the Canadian Parks Service, Prairie Region.

Flags of the Adventurers

Now the familiar "house flag" of the Hudson's Bay Company, the white banner bearing the famous HBC coat-of-arms has a long and dramatic history. It flew over ships of the Company's sailing fleet that left Gravesend for Hudson Bay in 1767 and it continued to identify Company vessels until the late eighteen hundreds. In this century it has been the standard of the HBC Governors and, since the 1970s, the Honourable Company's official flag. Now this fine 3 ft. x 6 ft. flag is available in weather-resistant nylon as a special limited offer to readers of *The Beaver.*

$56.98 each, postage paid.

From the great days of the fur trade until the Company was reorganized in the 1970s, the Hudson's Bay Company conducted its far-flung business and trading activities under its own distinctive Company flag, the familiar red ensign with the HBC initials in the fly. Now this historic flag is for sale to collectors and fur trade history enthusiasts who read *The Beaver.* This fine 3 ft. x 6 ft. flag, suitable for display, is made of weather-resistant nylon.

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(For Canadian orders please see tax information on page 48)

The Legacy of Colonel Stacey

In Canada, few public buildings bear the names of historians. One that does is a nondescript low-rise office building in an industrial mall in the Ottawa suburbs, identified by a brass plaque as The Colonel Charles P. Stacey Building. The name is appropriate. Charles Stacey was the greatest of Canadian military historians, and the Stacey Building houses the Department of National Defence's Directorate of History. DHist, as military jargon labels its, carries on Stacey's legacy. It writes the official history of Canada's fighting forces.

"Official history" is a dangerous label these days. Beset by PR, puffery, and self-promotion, we distrust all official statements and wonder almost instinctively about the real story concealed beneath any authorized version of events. In any case, given the hotly contested state of Canadian military history, any history that claims to be an authoritative statement on Canadians at war is likely to be criticized — if not for being too complimentary, then for not being complimentary enough. This spring, as DHist launches *The Crucible of War,* its massive history of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the Second World War, its historians realize they may be flying into controversy.

DHist's director, W.A.B. Douglas, seems content to have it so. Douglas, who retains just a hint of the square shoulders and imperturbable style of the naval officer he once was, thinks controversy goes with the job, and he thinks DHist is set up to cope with it. "Our terms of reference were set out by Charles Stacey," he says, "and they must be based on independence." Douglas himself resigned his military commission when he became DHist's director so that he could deal with the military unconstrained by rank.

"If my advice on historical matters were ever rejected, I would have to resign," Douglas declares about his relationship to the Department. Indeed, when I visited DHist, his

C.P. Stacey

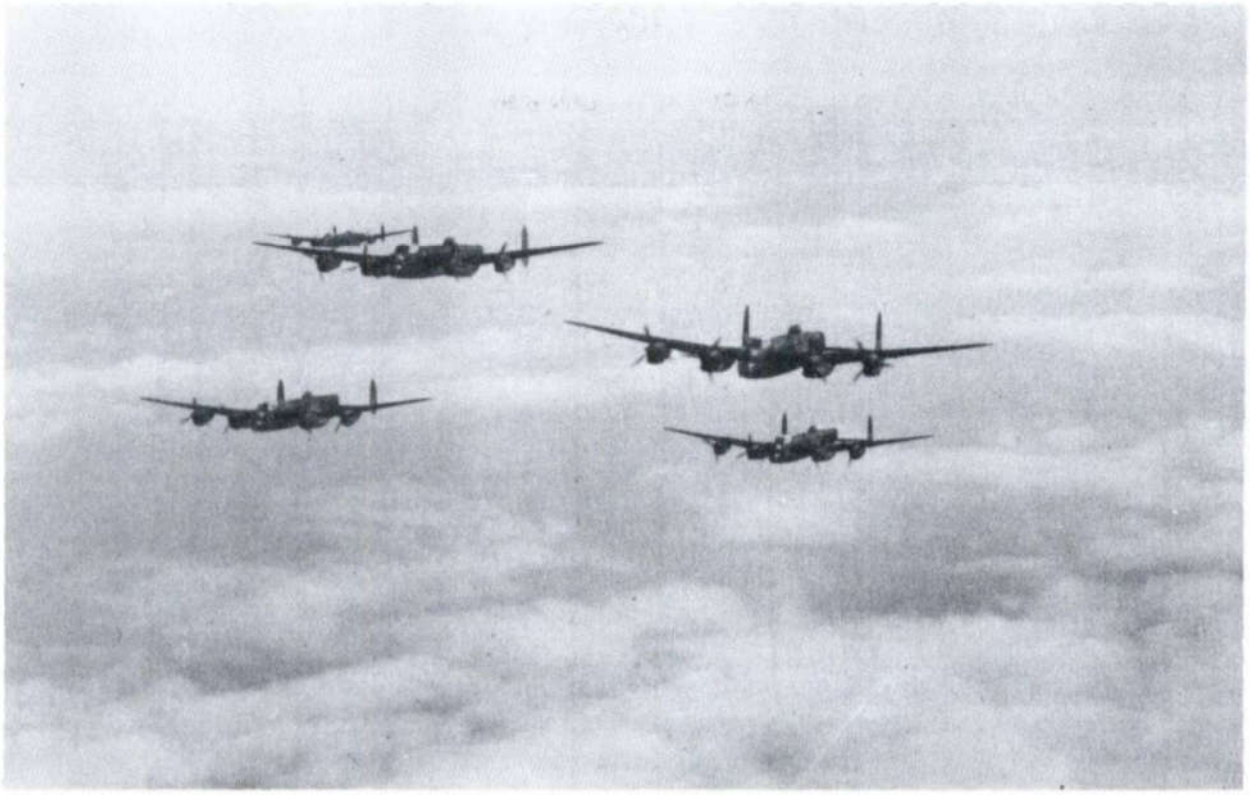
counterpart in France had just been fired by his political masters — in a controversy over the Dreyfus Affair. Douglas's staff was teasing him about the issues that might oblige him to fall on his sword, but none of them seemed to think it a serious likelihood. As a more typical outcome, Douglas pointed to a recent debate in a military journal between one of his staff and another historian. "They each have strong views — and I support them both. Passions should run high on historical issues."

The Stacey Building is military property, but with an unmilitary air that extends even to its street address on Holly Lane. Booklined shelves and reading tables give it much the same air as any other place where historical research goes on. That too has been Douglas's intent. He now has a staff who are mostly professional historians rather than professional soldiers (he earned his own Ph.D in eighteenth-century naval history), and he thinks DHist historians have the credentials and the talent to match any university department or research institute.

That tradition of professionalism goes back to Charles Stacey. When Stacey became historian to the Canadian Army overseas in 1940 the forces had had other chroniclers, back to journalist Max Aitken (the future Lord Beaverbrook) and poet Charles G.D. Roberts, who together produced *The Canadians in Flanders* while the First World War was still raging. But the record of Canada's military historians was undistinguished. Either they produced little at all, or they wrote "we were there" stories with no claim to be authoritative.

Stacey was something else. From his base at Canadian Army headquarters in London, he created the essential historical sources as the Second World War went on. Dispatching historical officers to every division, he in effect taught a fighting army how to keep historical records. His team even made the army appreciate history, feeding back digests and reports that established themselves as useful learning tools for units still in action.

Stacey's wartime organizing work was an extraordinary feat. He performed a greater one in the decade after the war, when with a small team he wrote the three-volume *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War.* Those volumes established what Official History was. It was not grip-



A flight of Lancasters heads for Germany on a Second World War bombing raid. The DHist expects some bumpy weather this spring over its account of Bomber Command.

ping you-are-there journalism, nor the spinning of academic theories of what might have been. Essentially, Stacey's official histories were a comprehensive account of the whole army and what it did, unit by scattered unit, in every theatre where it operated.

Such an account could only be built upon details, and Stacey showed himself a master of getting the details and getting them right. At his death in 1989, the obituaries honoured him as Canada's pre-eminent master of the technical craft of history. By its nature, official history is not easy reading. (For more unbuttoned Stacey, look into his *Quebec 1759* or his study of Mackenzie King, *A Very Double Life*.) But the official Army histories remain startlingly clear and economical examples of their genre. British military historian John Keegan has declared that no nation created better official accounts of the Second World War than Stacey gave the Canadian Army.

DHist was also Stacey's creation. When the forces were unified in 1965, Stacey came back from retirement (active, productive retirement as a professor at the University of Toronto) to unite the forces' historical staffs and to see work started on an Air Force history. Later, naval veterans helped ensure that DHist would also write an official naval history.

Stacey, a stern taskmaster, was not entirely satisfied with his creation. He thought DHist's plans too ambitious and its progress on the Air Force history much too slow: by 1980 only a single volume had appeared. (The third of four appears this year. The naval history should start to appear before the turn of the century.) But at the same time, Stacey's heirs at DHist may also be emerging from the influence of their master.

For one thing, DHist now takes on a lot more. Where Stacey wrote the history of the Army at war 1939-45, DHist Air Force history is covering all Canadian military fliers from Royal Flying Corps days through to unification in 1965. Meanwhile, DHist also publishes on other topics. Its Section Historique produced an authoritative study of bilingualism's impact on the Canadian forces, and Douglas proudly notes it is the only official history unit doing military social history, such as Jean-Pierre Gagnon's 220 Battalion history, which moves from battlefield actions to the backgrounds of its officers and men.

In recent years DHist has also been persuaded to begin producing illustrated anniversary volumes. The first, *Canada and the Battle of Vimy,* published in 1992 for the seventy-

fifth anniversary, won two international design awards. However, these books are hardly different from what commercial publishing provides in abundance, and they may exist mainly so that a former Minister could have elegant gifts to present at commemorative occasions.

Meanwhile, DHist also keeps up with the contemporary forces. In 1990 it dispatched Major Jean Morin, its first field historian since the Korean War, to the Persian Gulf. Lieutenant-Commander Richard Gimblett, who did sea duty in the Gulf with HMCS *Protecteur,* later joined him at DHist to work on Gulf War records. As he goes through the sources, Gimblett says, some things amaze him, but others — "I could have explained that if they had just come and asked me aboard *Protecteur*!" He and Morin plan to complete a preliminary account of the conflict next year.

Bosnia and Somalia, however, already loom larger in Canadian military history than the Gulf, and an official history of Canadian peacekeeping should surely become a DHist priority. DHist has no field historian in Sarajevo — it's a UN not a Canadian responsibility — but all peacekeeping units keep "war diaries" much as fighting forces did in Stacey's day. As units return, DHist debriefs peacekeepers and assembles the records.

Today's official historians are aware they are now mostly writing of events fifty years in the past, and the perspective given by distance imposes its own responsibilities. As they respond, today's military historians begin to diverge from Stacey.

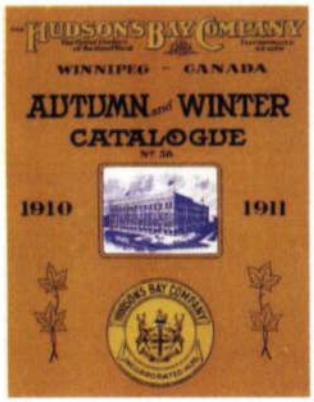
Brereton Greenhous, a longtime stalwart of DHist, says he is no longer an "unqualified" admirer of the man whose name is on the building. He argues, for instance, that when Stacey wrote of the First Canadian Army in northwest Europe, he was too much inclined to put the responsibility for setbacks on the regimental officers in the front lines and to spare the higher echelons — who were Stacey's headquarters colleagues during and after the war.

Stacey was no tame cat, but Greenhous suggests that when he wrote he was too close to the brass and too close to the events. Greenhous believes today's official historians are neither. Indeed, he thinks they are often more frank than most military historians. "The world is full of historians who don't want to rock the boat. They are not official historians, but they want to be on the 'official' side."

The Crucible of War 1939-1945, the latest volume of the official Air Force history, is an immense book, crammed with the relentless detail that Stacey would recognize. Greenhous, one of its four principal authors, calls it "ten years of unremitting effort." Douglas describes sending it off to the publishers as "a great burden lifting." It also has the potential to put the official historians once more into controversy. The longest section of a very long book is about Bomber Command's grim struggle in the skies over Germany. Allowing for the difference between official history and television documentary, the official history reaches conclusions similar to those of the "Death by Moonlight" segment of *The Valour and The Horror,* which prompted such condemnation from many veterans and many military historians.

The DHist historians do not expect to be condemned so ferociously by their professional colleagues, for they write and document everything in the form historians expect (and sadly, books rarely offend the way television programs can). But this unflinching look at Bomber Command may once more anger the group of veterans who tried to sue the film for libel (rejected by the courts, they have

GIFTS FROM THE PAST



HBC Catalogue, Autumn and Winter 1910-1911. A nostalgic look into the lives of our grandparents. A facsimile of the original edition. **$15.98 each.**

The 70th anniversary reprint of the first issue of ***The Beaver,*** **October 1920.** A collector's item. **$6.98 each.**

(See tax information on page 48)

recently appealed to the Supreme Court).

Why does military history remain so controversial? Well, says Brereton Greenhous, it's the most interesting subject around "because it reveals individuals and societies under the maximum possible stress. That's always interesting, and it's likely to be controversial too." Greenhous tends to be the most willing controversialist on the DHist staff, but he insists that the Directorate has always supported his freedom to speak out.

These days "official history" is often a derogatory term. Which would you rather have: the official line or the straight goods? The historians in the Stacey Building seek to write official history that is also recognized as historical straight goods. For Director Douglas, that is following the Stacey legacy. "Charles Stacey said DHist should be a research institute for the Armed Forces," says Director Douglas, "a conscience for the Army."

The Crucible of War, 1939-1945 (The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Volume III) by Brereton Greenhous, Stephen J. Harris, William C. Johnston and William G.P. Rawling, is being published this spring by University of Toronto Press in co-operation with the Department of National Defence. ◆

The Directorate of History welcomes researchers and inquiries on Canadian military history. Letters can be addressed to Dr. Carl Christie, Senior Research Officer, Directorate of History, National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K2.

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THE PACKET

Letters, Notes and Opinion

Fur Trade Conference

The Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 24-28, 1995.

The conference wishes to offer sessions that will bring the study of the fur trade into the twentieth century. Papers are invited from researchers interested in areas such as native studies, women's studies, ecology and the sciences, comparative studies, history, anthropology, literature, etc., that will explore European and Asian connections, mink and fox farming, conservation, animal population, woman's role, literary perspectives, etc. In addition, as the conference will be located in Atlantic Canada, a session of papers related to the Eastern Atlantic region is planned.

Papers are invited from scholars and researchers in the academic and professional communities, from all fields of study in the North American fur trade and related areas. A one-page abstract with title, name of author and institutional affiliation (if appropriate) should reach the conference organizers by 31 August 1994.

Mailing address: Seventh NAFTC, Barry Moody and Bill Wicken, Gorsebrook Research Institute for Atlantic Canada, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 3C3. **Telephone** (902) 420-5668. **Fax:** (902) 420-5530.

A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

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Making History

I read, with pleasure, Anne Morton's review of *While the Women Only Wept* in the December/January issue.

In her review Ms. Morton wonders whether the author of the book, Janice Potter-MacKinnon, is the same person who wrote *The Liberty We Seek; Loyalist Ideology in Colonial New York and Massachusetts.* Ms. Morton notes that the dust jacket information on the book under review is "oddly silent on this point".

The author is, indeed, one and the same person. You might also be interested to know that she is on leave as professor in the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan and is currently Minister of Finance for Saskatchewan.

Roger C. Carter, Q.C.
Professor Emeritus,
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Boilers from the steamer "Northcote", Cumberland House, August 1992. Photo by George Parsons.

Relics of the 'Northcote'

Robert Malcomson's story on the paddlewheeler *Northcote* [*The Beaver,* August/September 1993] was excellent, but his account of the vessel's ultimate fate omits an important fact.

While the *Northcote* may have been destroyed by fire at Cumberland House in 1904 "to relieve the locals of a useless eyesore", the author fails to mention that the boilers, driveshaft, and other mechanical components of the vessel have been preserved at Cumberland House as an historic monument.

I enclose a photo taken at Cumberland House in August, 1992. The relics are in good condition, obviously well cared for, and accompanied by a descriptive plaque housed in a stone kiosk partly visible in the left of the photo. Unfortunately I failed to record who is responsible for this commendable work of preservation, but think it is the Saskatchewan Government.

George Parsons,
Ottawa, Ontario.

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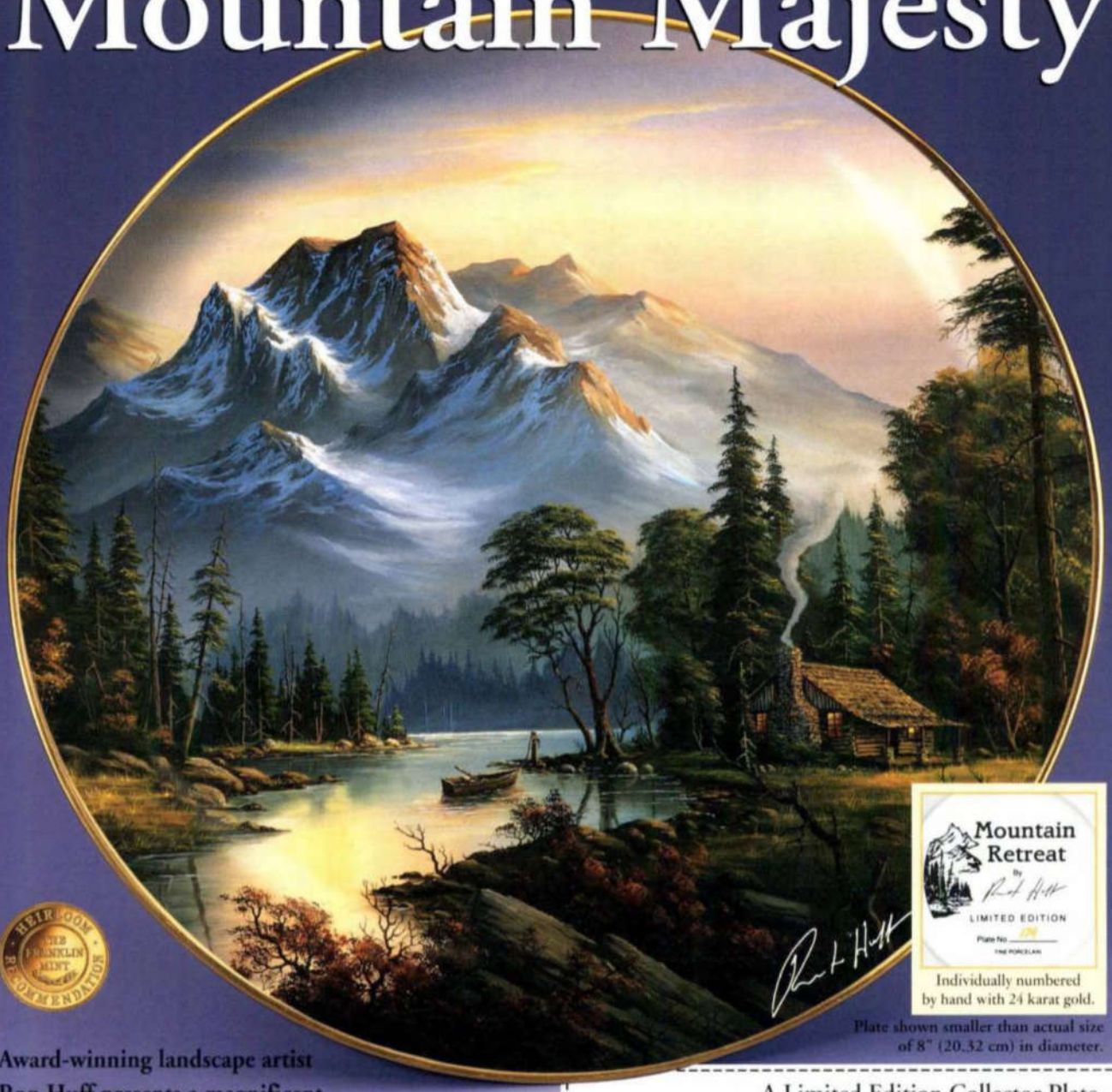
Fifth-Column

This is to point out a factual error in the article entitled "Fifth-Column Crises", by Larry Hannant, that appeared in your December 1993/ January 1994 edition. Mr. Hannant states that "fifth-column" is a phrase that was coined by General Francisco Franco when the real author of the quote was Franco's fellow Nationalist officer, General Mola. I enclose a copy of the article and a page from Hugh Thomas' definitive history of the Spanish Civil War.

Steve Anderson
Eagan,
Minnesota, U.S.A.

The editor of "The Beaver" welcomes contributions to The Packet. Comments on articles, observations on historic events and fresh information from unpublished sources are particularly encouraged. Letters may be edited for length.

Mountain Majesty



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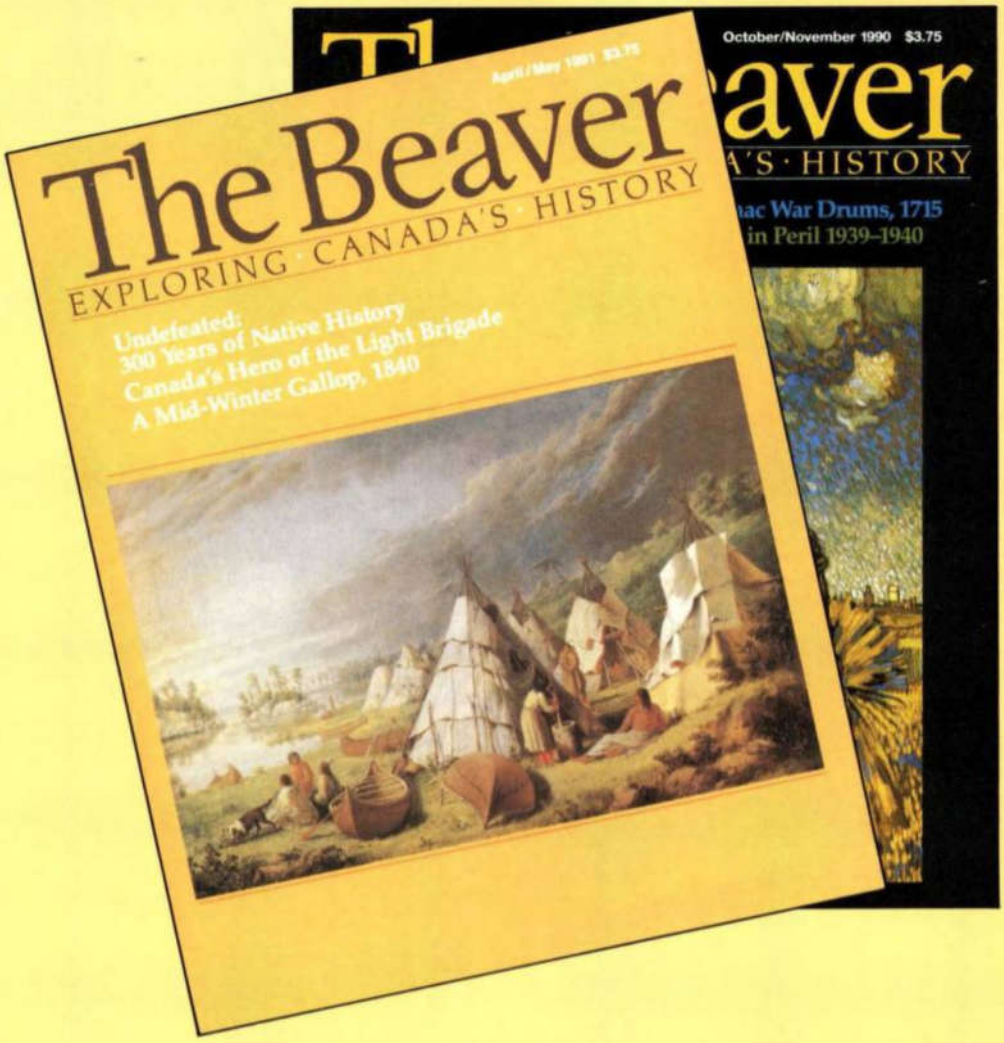

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